

"Cancer" is described as their diagnosis
by three times as many patients
scheduled for mastectomy compared
with those scheduled for breast
conserving surgery

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Psychological distress in breast cancer patients

- ▶ Well studied ***after*** the operation
- ▶ Main effect related the change in body image
- ▶ The effect of ***the prospect*** of a mastectomy have never been studied
- ▶ ***We wondered:***
 - ▶ Does the psychological distress of a cancer operation commence even *before* the operation?
 - ▶ Does a patient's perception of a diagnosis of cancer depend on the type of operation she is about to undergo?

Patients admitted for surgery & had at least 2 consultations giving the explicit diagnosis of cancer

Student doctor:
“Why are you having the operation?”

The scheduled operation	“Cancer”	A euphemistic term such as “breast lump”	Total
Mastectomy	19	7	26
Breast conserving surgery	6	20	26

These responses did NOT correlate with their age or their final Nottingham prognostic index.

A novel finding

- ▶ Unique study
- ▶ Candid questioning:
 - ▶ *Reveals what the patient has accepted as her diagnosis*
- ▶ The extent of the operation changes the perceived diagnosis:
 - ▶ *Patients having mastectomy feel the need to internalise the diagnosis of cancer, while those having breast conserving surgery are spared the trauma.*
- ▶ Psychological impact of mastectomy
 - ▶ *is more than just cosmetic and*
 - ▶ *starts before the operation*