

Bras Still Cause Breast Cancer: Are Your Patients Dressed To Kill?

By Sydney Ross Singer and Soma Grismaijer, ANMA Journal

When we first announced our theory and research linking breast cancer with the wearing of bras, we were laughed at, ridiculed, or simply ignored. "How can a foundation garment lead to disease? Absurd. It's too simplistic. There is no scientific evidence."

That was back in 1995, when our book *Dressed To Kill: The Link Between Breast Cancer and Bras* (Avery/Penguin Putnam 1995; ISCD Press 2002) was published. We had expected an open-minded, if not enthusiastic reception to our research showing that bras are the leading cause of breast cancer. We were naïve. Breast cancer is more than a disease. It is a cultural phenomenon.

Dressed To Kill described our 1991-93 Bra and Breast Cancer Study, examining the bra wearing habits and attitudes of about 4,700 American women, nearly half of whom had had breast cancer. The study results showed that wearing a bra over 12 hours daily dramatically increases breast cancer incidence. Bra-free women were shown to have about the same incidence of breast cancer as men, while those who wear a bra 18-24 hours daily have over 100 times greater incidence of breast cancer than do bra-free women. This link was 3-4 times greater than that between cigarettes and lung cancer!

Our theory explaining these findings is that the bra, an elastic garment designed to alter breast shape, applies constant pressure to the soft breast tissue, compressing and constricting lymphatic vessels. Evidence of this constriction are the red marks and indentations in the skin left behind by the bra. Since the role of the lymphatics is to flush out toxins and debris from the tissues, impairment of lymphatic flow can lead to the toxification of the breast tissue. These toxins include endogenous toxins resulting from the consequent tissue hypoxia, as well as the exogenous toxins that contaminate our food, water and air in our petrochemically polluted world. Many of these toxins are carcinogenic. The bra concentrates these in the breast by preventing the lymphatics from flushing them away.

Of course, this means that the cause of breast cancer is not the bra, per se, but the toxins that the bra concentrates in the breast tissue due to lymphatic impairment.

Interestingly, when you look at the worldwide statistics on breast cancer, it is clear that it is only a problem in cultures where bras are worn. No bras, and men and women have about the same low incidence of breast cancer. And the bra link also explains various breast cancer risk factors, as we discuss in *Dressed To Kill*.

While more research is clearly needed to further study this link, we believe it is prudent medicine to recommend women abstain from bra wearing as a precaution. There is no reason for wearing a bra, apart from fashion. The human body was not designed with a flaw that requires modern lingerie for correction. Like the absurd and destructive fashion of foot binding in China, women in the West bind their breasts. Surely, we believed, once women understood how this practice is threatening their health and lives, they will stop wearing bras.

However, it wasn't that simple. Women are cultural beings, and in this culture female identity and body image are tied in with breast shape and size. Bras help define a woman's sense of self. Changing bra wearing habits is akin to changing one's self image.

Dictating that image are the garment and fashion industries that define acceptable breast shape and the clothing women must wear that require that shape. And for those who cannot fit the mold, plastic surgeons are standing by to help women better fit their clothes.

And while nobody would say they want women to get breast cancer, the fact is that the culture has become invested in this disease. That is the nature of a culturogenic disease. It becomes embedded in our way of life. The bra industry is a multi-billion dollar enterprise. And billions of dollars are spent each year researching and treating this disease. Ironically, ending breast cancer can cause financial hardship for many people.

We have become a breast cancer culture. As a result, our information was seen as a threat to that culture. Sometimes a disease is less threatening than change.

But then something happened that we had not foreseen. Some courageous women who had heard our message tried going bra-free and reported their experiences to us. Within weeks, if not days, most of these women experienced a profound change in their breast health. Breast pain and tenderness virtually ended. Cysts that had needed regular aspirations disappeared. We began to realize that fibrocystic breast disease, common in bra-wearing cultures, should be called "tight bra syndrome".

It all made perfect sense, of course. The bra was causing secondary lymphedema of the breasts due to constriction of the lymphatics. The accumulated fluid caused increased tissue pressure with associated pain and tenderness, and eventually developed into cysts. While the fibrous tissue that develops in long standing cysts takes more time to resolve, relieving the pressure by eliminating the bra allowed the cysts to drain, alleviating the pressure and discomfort. (This also explained by many women have breast myalgia near the time of their menstrual period. Estrogen levels are elevated at this time, increasing overall body fluid retention and increasing breast size. However, women typically wear the same size bra all month long, making it particularly tight at these times, increasing breast pain. Once bra-free, this syndrome usually stops.)

The results are fast, impressive and transformative. It was this link with fibrocystic breast disease that helped keep our bra-cancer theory alive. While it didn't prove the cancer connection, it did show that the bra was damaging the breasts, adding support to our claims.

We then did a follow-up study to our first US study. This time we went to Fiji, where half the population is bra-free. We approached the Health Ministry and asked for their assistance. Once we told them our theory, they exclaimed, "That explains why our working women are now getting breast cancer! They are the ones who wear bras!" Over the next few months we went from village to village and obtained over 20 case histories of breast cancer. All were in women who wore bras. We found that, given women from the same village (genetically related), with the same diet, the ones who developed breast cancer were the ones who wore bras.

We began getting support from naturopaths, chiropractors, massage therapists, and some allopaths. But the allopathic authorities were not willing to consider the issue, and, as you know, they control the media and the government medical agenda, (another culturogenic cause of various diseases). To date, the American Cancer Society states on its website, "Internet e-mail rumors and at least one book have suggested that bras cause breast cancer by obstructing lymph flow. There is no scientific or clinical basis for that claim." And they don't have any interest in doing research into this claim, either.

Meanwhile, a recent Japanese study (*J Physiol Anthropol Appl Human Sci.* 2002 Jan; 21 (1): 67-74) has shown that bras impair the autonomic nervous system. It concludes, "Our data indicate that the higher clothing pressures exerted by a conventional brassiere have a significant negative impact on the ANS activity, which is predominantly attributable to the significant decrease in the parasympathetic as well as the thermoregulatory sympathetic nerve activities. Since the ANS activity plays an important role in modulating the internal environment in the human body, excess clothing pressures caused by constricting types of foundation garments on the body would consequently undermine women's health." Two other studies from Japan found similar results.

Why is this research coming from Japan and not the U.S.? Japan has not been a bra wearing culture, until recently. In fact, Japan has been the only first world culture that has been relatively spared breast cancer, because traditional Japanese attire did not include the bra. Now, however, the Japanese have adopted the West's obsession with breasts and bras, leading to increased breast cancer rates there.

Also interesting is a study done in the year 2000 by two breast cancer specialists in the UK for a television documentary. The study followed 100 women with fibrocystic breast disease as they went 3 months bra-free. The results were astounding, and nearly created a panic. The documentary, "Bras – The Bare Facts", made international news in the British Commonwealth, but was completely ignored in the U.S.

It takes personal integrity and a commitment to health for women and the men in their lives to stand up and say no to the bra. Fortunately, ending the bra habit is really easy and gives immediate health benefits. All women really need is the encouragement.

The naturopath treating a patient for breast disease needs to keep in mind the cultural issues that compel women into wearing bras, as well as the fact that the bra habit is addictive, physically and emotionally. You may want to discuss the issue with the patient's partner, as well, since men are often the reason why women wear bras in the first place. In fact, it would be ideal to offer women a support group while they break the bra habit. Some women fear harassment at work, or feel naked in public without a bra. They need to express these concerns with other women who have realized the health benefits of being bra-free, and have learned that these culturally programmed fears are really unfounded.

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