ASO Author Reflections: Shouldn't Beauty be in the Eye of the Beholder?

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PAST

Over the past several decades, breast surgeons have become increasingly concerned with cosmesis as an important outcome of breast-conserving surgery. The simplest way to assess this is with patient-reported Likert scales; however, such measures have been criticized for their apparent lack of objectivity. Clinician-based assessments, such as the Harvard/ECOG/NSABP Cosmesis Grading Scale, which incorporate benchmarks for what constitutes poor, fair, good, and excellent outcomes, have become widely used, particularly in clinical trials. More complex 'objective' assessments using artificial intelligence to predict cosmetic outcome based on measurements of breast volume, symmetry, and contour are available but these involve capital cost and equipment that is not widely available. The optimal method by which to assess cosmesis remains unclear.^{1,2}

PRESENT

Ideally, cosmetic assessment should be uniform across different raters and should reflect the perceptions of the patient. We assessed the Harvard/ECOG/NSABP Cosmesis Grading Scale and found that there was poor interrater reliability between surgeons and that their assessments did not correlate well with patients' views.³ While most patients found their results to be good/excellent, their perceptions were either better or worse than surgeons'

depending on when the assessment was made, suggesting that the discordant views were not due to 'dove' versus 'hawk' raters, but rather a genuine difference of opinion.

FUTURE

Thus, while the Harvard/ECOG/NSABP scale has been widely used, ratings vary by observer. While work continues to be done to create more 'objective' scales, one wonders whether the pendulum ought to swing back towards patient-reported outcome measures of cosmesis rather than those that rely on surgeon opinion. After all, if beauty is in the eye of the beholder, shouldn't patients' views trump all others?

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