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

L Jones, P Law & J S Vaidya
Department of Surgery and Molecular Oncology, Ninewells Hospital and Medical School, University of Dundee
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The scheduled operation</th>
<th>“Cancer”</th>
<th>A euphemistic term such as “breast lump”</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mastectomy</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breast conserving</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

L Jones, P Law, J S Vaidya
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