

# BREAST CANCER AWARENESS AND SCREENING IN PATIENTS WITH SYSTEMIC LUPUS ERYTHEMATOSUS

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## BACKGROUND

Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) patients present a lower frequency of cancer screening than the general population. Although studies do not show an increased risk of breast cancer in this group, it is the most common cancer in Brazilian women. For breast cancer, two strategies are in use: **breast awareness** (BA, meaning a woman becoming familiar with her own breasts so she can notice early changes which might help suspecting of breast cancer) and **screening**. We highlight that BA is different from the no-longer recommended breast self-examination (a regular palpation performed monthly, at the same time, by a trained woman). The aim of this analysis was to evaluate the BA and screening in lupus patients attending at a tertiary rheumatology service.

## METHODS

A cross-sectional analysis was performed. Information was collected by telephone interview with patients over 18 years of age. Breast awareness was investigated with questions about breast palpation, since no specific training was previously given. Screening was considered in accordance with the Brazilian Ministry of Health (MH/BR): gynecologist/mastologist consultation and/or biannually mammography in women aged 50 to 69 years old or younger if positive family history of breast cancer before the age of 50 years had been reported.

## RESULTS

The mean (SD) age of 144 patients was 44.7 (12.3) years, and 106 (73.6%) reported BA. The reasons why 38 women did not exam their own breasts were: "I believe it is not indicated" for 11 (29.0%); "I don't know how to exam them" for 8 (21.1%) in addition to fear/impatience, one patient each; and 17 (44.7%) did not respond/know why. As for the 42 patients with screening indication according to the MH/BR, 40 (95.2%) reported a gynecologist/mastologist consultation (annually in 26) and 39 (92.9%) reported having had a mammography, 29 (56.4%) in the last 2 years. Considering patients with no indication for screening, it is noteworthy that 41 (39.8%) reported having had a mammography at least once, while 24 (60.0%) reported doing so it in the last 2 years.

## CONCLUSION

In this analysis, SLE patients reported a higher screening frequency for breast cancer than the 24% Brazilian women from general population who performed annual/biannual mammography, according to the Brazilian Society of Mastology. However, a significant number of lupus patients underwent mammography less frequently than indicated. There is no screening data for breast cancer in Brazilian lupus patients, which is scarce even in the international literature. It is possible that specific programs focused on continuous patient and health professional's education would improve these rates.

## KEYWORDS

Systemic lupus erythematosus, Breast cancer, Breast awareness, Screening, Mammography.