

## Obamacare's threat to breast cancer treatment

By: Henry Payne – July 16, 2013

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Actress Angelina Jolie's public decision to have a double mastectomy and reconstruction to preempt breast cancer has buoyed women's hopes that cancer can not only be met head on — but it need not compromise their beauty and self-esteem. Yet breast cancer is also a cautionary tale of how government regulation may endanger women's health.

Today, just as aggressive research and public education have helped millions of American women survive breast cancer, Obamacare's federal takeover of health care threatens to turn back the clock on breast cancer treatment.

Thanks to its heavy investment in medical care, the United States leads the world in life expectancy (once its high homicide rate is factored out), including breast cancer survivability at 89 percent — over 10 percent higher than European nations according to the International Agency for Research on Cancer. Health is wealth. But unless Americans roll back Obamacare, modeled on centralized, heavily-regulated European systems, breast cancer survival rates are likely to reverse after years of gains.

Women already dodged a bullet when the FDA, under the zealous leadership of David Kessler in 1992, limited the availability of silicone, a common gel used in breast reconstruction.

“In the vast majority of cases silicone implants are used in breast reconstruction, due to their profound advantage over saline in their look and feel,” says Dr. Anthony Youn, an assistant professor of surgery at Oakland University's William Beaumont School of Medicine. “The FDA's moratorium on silicone breast implants was a reactionary-type response to a lot of scientifically unfounded fears.”

Kessler's hysterical regulation, a response to anecdotal evidence from tort lawsuits, threw the U.S. market in turmoil for 14 years, frightening woman and discouraging reconstructive surgery so crucial to overcoming the fear of mastectomy.

“The new anatomical breast implants and improved surgical techniques available for patients today help make this kind of difficult decision less agonizing,” says Los Angeles plastic surgeon Dr. David Sayah about the silicone implants that Jolie had implanted.

Also key to Jolie's lesson are the billions spent on breast cancer by America's free-market system. “The U.S. has had a faster decline in breast cancer mortality than (other) countries because it took better advantage of technological advances in screening and treatment,” concluded University of Pennsylvania researchers.

“The one common characteristic of all national health care systems is that they ration care,” writes the Cato Institute’s Michael Tanner of Obamacare’s foreign cousins. The rationing comes from “imposing global budgets or cost constraints that limit the availability of high tech medical equipment or imposing long waits on patients seeking treatment.”

“In the United States, there are no such government limits,” he concludes. “This translates directly into saving lives.”

Lots of lives. The U.S. breast cancer survival rate of 89 percent outpaces Germany, for example, at 78 percent or England’s 77 percent. The same pattern is true for all cancers.

Canada, which also has high cancer survivability, benefits from its proximity to the bounty of U.S. — and Michigan — doctors. “Seven out of 10 Canadian provinces report sending prostate-cancer patients to the U.S. for radiation treatment” reports Tanner, due to long wait times in Canada. Where will they go as America becomes more like Canada? Where will Americans go?

As Obamacare looms in the U.S., the medical community fears that patients will suffer.

“There are some questions about whether there will be enough providers to cover the millions of newly insured patients that Obamacare will create,” says Youn. “A major part of the funding of Obamacare is by decreasing Medicare rates to providers and hospitals. Is it possible that some providers will stop performing these procedures or quit the practice of medicine altogether? I think so. Most projections show we will likely not have enough practicing doctors to provide the same care that currently insured people are getting today.”

“The decision to have a mastectomy was not easy,” Jolie wrote in *The New York Times* after her surgery. “But it is one I am very happy that I made. I can tell my children that they don’t need to fear they will lose me to breast cancer.”

Thanks to free market health care, women need not fear breast cancer. The government’s takeover of health care is another matter.