

Senator Feelgood and the limits of “Awareness”

Written by Margaret

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[Senator Amy Klobuchar is promoting a measure that would fund genetic testing for women in their 30s and 40s for breast cancer.](#)

A great thing you say? Not so much. Breast cancer in this group is pretty rare, and genetic testing doesn't really get you very much, except to tell you whether you have a higher probability of getting breast cancer than the average person.

Family history screening (merely finding out whether you have any close relatives who had it) is a better indicator and costs far less than genetic testing. You could get tested if you have this kind of history but it would merely confirm your inheritance of a genetic marker.

Even if you find out you have a higher probability of having breast cancer, there is no real action item if you don't actually have cancer, even if it's you don't have cancer

yet

There are some women who, freaked out by a “elevated cancer risk” will go full steam into a double mastectomy and replacement surgery. They would choose it over simply getting regular checkups, mammograms and checking their own bodies.

If they are paying for their own testing, surgery and making their own decisions, it's hard to question someone's expensive and painful choice.

Obviously, if the history is clear and the genetic marker is present, the choice will look a lot different. But promoting genetic testing to a general population promotes false choices.

It emphasizes testing (costly) over personal responsibility and prevention (relatively cheap).

Senator Amy's approach is what is bankrupting the system-- promoting tests that give most people useless information. And with it the idea that if you aren't getting tested, somehow you're not taking care of yourself.

Given that healthcare dollars used in one area can't be used in another, it's important to question the priorities here.

A dollar used to screen women for a relatively rare type of cancer occurrence is a dollar less that could be used to make the film based (not even the more expensive digital) mammogram available to some other woman. A woman who actually could have cancer and for whom early intervention would actually be life saving, not just needless anxiety inducing.

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Even the pink ribbon brigade is flummoxed by why anyone would support this legislation.