Mammographers' perception of women's breast cancer risk.

OBJECTIVE: To understand mammographers' perception of individual women's breast cancer risk.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: Radiologists interpreting screening mammography examinations completed a mailed survey consisting of questions pertaining to demographic and clinical practice characteristics, as well as 2 vignettes describing different risk profiles of women. Respondents were asked to estimate the probability of a breast cancer diagnosis in the next 5 years for each vignette. Vignette responses were plotted against mean recall rates in actual clinical practice.

RESULTS: The survey was returned by 77% of eligible radiologists. Ninety-three percent of radiologists overestimated risk in the vignette involving a 70-year-old woman; 96% overestimated risk in the vignette involving a 41-year-old woman. Radiologists who more accurately estimated breast cancer risk were younger, worked full-time, were affiliated with an academic medical center, had fellowship training, had fewer than 10 years experience interpreting mammograms, and worked more than 40% of the time in breast imaging. However, only age was statistically significant. No association was found between radiologists' risk estimate and their recall rate.
CONCLUSION: U.S. radiologists have a heightened perception of breast cancer risk.

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