LETTER TO THE EDITOR
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Nipple-sparing mastectomy in normal breast: consequence of simulation and disease anxiety

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ABSTRACT

Diagnosis in psychiatry is a thorough and potentially artificial process. In this letter, we discuss this diagnostic process in the context of a young patient who underwent nipple-sparing mastectomy after falsifying a breast biopsy report revealing invasive ductal carcinoma. The secondary pathology revision was also forged by the patient and confirmed the diagnosis. The patient was summoned by the Service's board and admitted the falsification of breast cancer reports. After evaluation at the Psychiatric Service, changes in vital mood, psychosis, delusional activity and obsessive-compulsive symptoms were ruled out. In view of the growing demand for prophylactic mastectomy observed worldwide, similar cases may become more frequent.

KEYWORDS: breast neoplasms; patient simulation; factitious disorders.

Dear editor,

We would like to report a case received for evaluation in our Service, relevant for its severity, rarity and for having drawn multidisciplinary attention. In addition, the present case exposes the detailed and artificial diagnostic process in psychiatry. In this case, identifying the real motivation for fraud determines the final diagnosis.

A 24-year-old woman was sent to the Mastology Service after falsifying a breast biopsy report, revealing an invasive ductal carcinoma. The patient also forged the secondary pathology revision and confirmed the diagnosis. She underwent nipple-sparing mastectomy associated with sentinel lymph node biopsy and immediate right breast reconstruction with expansive prosthesis. After extensive evaluation of the material, fibrocystic alterations and fibroadenosis areas were observed, with no evidence of neoplasm. The patient was summoned by the Service board and admitted the forgery of the reports regarding the breast cancer.

After evaluation in the Psychiatry Service, vital mood alterations, psychosis, delusional activity and obsessive-compulsive symptoms were ruled out. The patient pointed out as motivation for her actions the fact that she had lost her grandfather to prostate cancer a year before, having then acquired an excessive fear of developing neoplasms in the future. Upon discovering the nodules, the patient aimed for the removal of the breast. For that matter, the patient admitted feeling regretful for breaking the law, but not for the surgical removal of her breast.

In the case described above, the diagnosis established was disease anxiety, by DSM-5. Nonetheless, the simulation attestation is also adequate, once there is conscious and deliberate production of the symptoms, and equally conscious motivation by the examinee[1]. However, while interviewing the patient's mother, it was ascertained that the patient was recently divorced and that, at the time of the surgery, the marriage was about to end. It was observed from these factors the presence of a distinct unconscious motivation: through the production of a mammary disease, she would be able to draw more attention from her ex-husband, and even a possible way of keeping the marriage. The patient denies this hypothesis and the analysis of this possible unconscious factor would demand extensive anamnestic and therapeutic processes. Nevertheless, in case this version is true, the most adequate diagnosis by the DSM-5 would be Factitious Disorder, once there is conscious production of the act and unconscious motivation[1].

To our knowledge, this is the second case of effectively performed mastectomy after the adulterated production of reports[2].

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Notwithstanding, other cases of simulation have been described involving mammary pathologies and fictitious breast cancer family history[3,4]. Therefore, because of the increasing demand for prophylactic mastectomy observed all over the world, similar cases might become more frequent.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

L.R.S.: Conceptualization, Data curations, Formal analysis, Writing — original draft, Writing — review & editing.
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M.A.R.M.: Data curations, Formal analysis, Writing — original draft, Writing — review & editing.
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