Breast cancer remains a leading health concern for women. Genetic medical research is beginning to alter breast cancer screening recommendations and breast cancer treatment. This article discusses the use of the Family Systems Genetic Illness (FSGI) Model to provide greater understanding of some of the more common personal and family issues related to breast cancer. After a brief presentation of a case study of a woman who chose to undergo bilateral mastectomy to avoid breast cancer and a critique of the FSGI Model, application of the FSGI Model to breast cancer will be considered. The FSGI Model categorizes genetic illness according to the degree of the genetic risk the illness has, potential severity, age of clinical onset, and whether treatment can alter the onset or course. The article seeks to help nurses assist women in balancing their personal and family responsibilities and choices in light of new knowledge and medical care of breast cancer today.

At a Glance

✦ Genetic medical research is increasingly altering healthcare decisions in cancer care.
✦ The Family Systems Genetic Illness Model provides a useful tool for nurses working with women at high risk for breast cancer and their families.
✦ All women with a family history of breast cancer should see a genetics counselor.