

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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UT SOUTHWESTERN STUDIES FURTHER ELUCIDATE CAUSES, POSSIBILITY OF BREAST-IMPLANT RUPTURES

DALLAS – March 25, 1999 – Two recent studies have enabled UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas plastic surgeons to further elucidate the reasons for silicone-gel breast implant rupture and aging.

“The science of breast-implant aging has received much attention in the past five years, and it is critical to deliver optimal care to patients with existing implants or those considering the placement of breast implants,” said Dr. William Adams Jr., an assistant professor of plastic surgery who has conducted extensive laboratory research on the silicone elastomer, or implant shell.

The researchers confirmed in a study published in the December issue of *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*, the journal of the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons, that the risk of silicone-implant rupture significantly increases with the age of the implant, corroborating previous studies.

“The life span of these implants was initially presumed to be unlimited,” said Dr. Jeffrey Kenkel, assistant professor of plastic surgery and a co-author of the study. “However several reports have demonstrated that the silicone elastomer does have a finite life span.”

Silicone implants have been controversial since multiple lawsuits attempted to confirm a

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causative relationship between these implants and autoimmune diseases such as lupus and scleroderma. There has been no conclusive evidence to establish this relationship.

The UT Southwestern scientists found that the average age of implants that rupture was 13.4 years. Previous studies that focused on implant rupture showed that a significant number of implants fail after eight to 10 years.

Another UT Southwestern study by Adams, published in the January issue of *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*, investigated lipid infiltration as a possible cause of silicone-gel breast implant aging. Commonly used saline implants are enclosed in a silicone shell.

The team concluded that lipids, absorbed from the blood, infiltrate the outer silicone shell. This leads to progressive mechanical weakening of this outer shell and may result in implant aging and rupture.

Adams has also recently submitted an application for a National Institutes of Health grant to resolve the issue of capsular contracture, or scarring around the implant. He has also developed an improved implant pocket irrigation solution. Plastic surgeons use irrigation solutions to minimize infection and capsular contracture at the implant site.

Adams said, "Our ultimate goal with all of these studies is to use data to take better care of our patients."

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