

# Breast cancer surgeon challenges status quo

By Katie Hafner, New York Times

Late one afternoon this summer, Laura J. Esserman, a breast cancer surgeon at UC San Francisco, sat in a darkened room scrutinizing a breast MR.I. With a clutch of other clinicians at her side, she quickly homed in on a spot smaller than a pencil eraser.

She heard the words “six-millimeter mass.” Her response was swift:

“No.”

Meaning no biopsy.

Most doctors, including the radiologist seated next to her, would have said yes. But Esserman, who has dedicated much of her professional life to trying to get the medical establishment to think differently about breast cancer, foresaw only unnecessary anxiety for the patient, who had had several biopsies in the past – all benign.

Esserman, 58, is one of the most vocal proponents of the idea that breast cancer screening brings with it overdiagnosis and overtreatment. Her philosophy is controversial, to say the least. For decades, the specter of women dying for lack of intervention has made aggressive treatment a given.

**Read the whole story**