Erectile dysfunction (ED) is a common side effect of radical prostatectomy, though not always permanent, and almost all men experience some degree of ED following this surgery. The impact of ED on self-esteem and body image to prostate cancer patients can be as detrimental as the loss of a breast can be to a woman. However, the Women’s Health and Cancer Rights Act, passed by Congress in 1998, requires that third-party payers who cover mastectomy for breast cancer treatment also cover the costs of breast reconstruction.

“There is compelling evidence that ED treatment leads to improved quality of life for the man and his partner,” said Ira D. Sharlip, M.D., a spokesman for the AUA. Therefore, as in the case of breast reconstruction for women, the cost of ED treatment should most certainly be covered for men.”

A number of treatments for ED are available, including oral pharmacotherapies (approximately $10 per pill), intracavernosal injections ($25 per treatment), intraurethral alprostadil ($25 per treatment), vacuum erection devices ($450) and penile implants ($12,000). On average, breast reconstruction surgeries cost $12,000 to $20,000.

Approximately 60,000 radical prostatectomies and breast reconstruction surgeries are performed each year. Researchers used this patient population to determine healthcare costs for ED therapy over a projected 10-year life expectancy and found that, on average, the costs to treat ED was significantly less than the cost of breast reconstruction. The authors conclude that the time for legislative gender parity in this area has come.

About the American Urological Association: Founded in 1902 and headquartered near Baltimore, Maryland, the American Urological Association is the pre-eminent professional organization for urologists, with more than 15,000 members throughout the world. An educational nonprofit organization, the AUA pursues its mission of fostering the highest standards of urologic care by carrying out a wide variety of programs for members and their patients, including UrologyHealth.org, an award-winning on-line patient education resource, and the American Urological Association Foundation, Inc.

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