

Monica Morrow, M.D., FACS
2016 Susan G. Komen®
Brinker Award for Scientific Distinction in Clinical Research



Monica Morrow, M.D., FACS, is being honored for her important contributions to the field of breast cancer surgery which have advanced less invasive surgical treatments and helped to shape the standard of care for breast cancer patients. Dr. Morrow has championed the concept of “more is not necessarily better” when it comes to breast cancer treatments, and has devoted her career to applying the advances from clinical trials to daily surgical practice to improve breast cancer patient care and quality of life.

Much of Dr. Morrow’s research has focused on reducing the morbidities associated with breast cancer diagnosis and treatment without diminishing the effectiveness of treatment and patient outcomes. Dr. Morrow has led numerous clinical trials of surgical and integrated, multimodality treatments that have had a significant impact on the standard of care for patients with breast cancer. She was instrumental in showing that sentinel lymph node dissection is an effective and safe alternative to complete (axillary) lymph node dissection for women with early metastatic breast cancer who undergo lumpectomy with radiation and systemic therapy. This finding will enable select women to avoid the complications associated with axillary dissection, such as lymphedema.

As she advanced in her career, Dr. Morrow became known for her willingness to challenge conventions and her strong commitment to evidence-based surgery. She led the national (American College of Surgeons, American College of Radiology, and College of American Pathologists) efforts to develop standards for breast-conserving surgery for invasive breast cancer and ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS) in 2002 and 2007. She also chaired national (Society of Surgical Oncology (SSO), the American Society of Therapeutic Radiation Oncology (ASTRO) and the American Society for Clinical Oncology (ASCO)) committees that conducted meta-analyses of clinical trial data and developed evidence-based, consensus guidelines that better define the optimal surgical margins for breast-conserving surgery with whole breast irradiation in stage I and II invasive breast cancer (2013) and for the treatment of DCIS (2015). These guidelines, already endorsed by multiple oncology societies, have the potential to significantly reduce unnecessary breast surgeries (re-excisions) and improve patient outcomes.

More recently, Dr. Morrow’s research has focused on identifying factors that predict for successful lumpectomy, as well as the use of molecular profiling to identify patients at high and low risk for locoregional recurrence after surgery to aid with the personalization of local therapy. She is also interested in understanding how women with breast cancer make decisions about their surgical treatment. Dr. Morrow has studied how well patients understand their treatment choices and identified factors which are important to women when making these decisions. She found that the more a patient is involved in the decision-making process, the more the patient will decide on having a mastectomy instead of breast-conserving treatment. This research will inform the development of communication interventions and decision aids that will help patients understand and make informed decisions about their treatment.

Dr. Morrow received her M.D. from Jefferson Medical College. She did her surgical residency at the Medical Center Hospital of Vermont, followed by 2 years of surgical oncology training at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York. After serving on the faculty at Northwestern University Medical School and as Chair of Surgery at Fox Chase Cancer Center, she came back to Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, where she currently is the chief of the Breast Surgery Service, Anne Burnett Windfohr Chair of Clinical Oncology and co-chief of the Breast Program. She is also Professor of Surgery at Weill Medical College of Cornell University.

Dr. Morrow brings a passion to her work that is unsurpassed. She is committed to her patients and also to teaching and training the next generation of breast cancer surgeons. She challenges the status quo – advocating that more treatment is not necessarily better for patients – and uses clinical evidence to advance clinical practice and empower women to make important decisions with their doctors about their breast cancer treatment. Dr. Morrow's work has improved the lives of countless women with breast cancer, and it will continue to have a profound impact on the way that breast cancer is treated for years to come.