Angelina Jolie’s decision was based on sound advice, according to Dr. Gilbert Ross, Medical Director of ACSH, who states, Evidence shows that women with her BRCA1 mutation have a substantially higher risk of developing breast cancer and her very personal decision to have prophylactic bilateral mastectomies was, in our opinion at ACSH, a wise and correct decision.

However, it is important to note that the decision to get tested should not be taken lightly. Women would benefit from discussing testing with their physicians and families, as it is a very personal decision. According to Dr. Ross, For women with strong evidence of breast cancer in their family history, especially if the diagnosis was made relatively early in life, testing for the BRCA mutation may be in order.

Some women with positive family histories may not necessarily have the BRCA mutation, but may still be concerned to the point of severe anxiety about the possibility of developing breast cancer. Women may contemplate having bilateral mastectomies without any medical or scientific data to support such a course. Nevertheless, each woman has to make such a decision using her own individual concerns, including medical evidence and the support of her family. There is the option to have the procedure done regardless of the medical evidence.

On the other hand, women who would not consider undergoing surgery may not benefit from being tested for the mutation at all. This is an important point to consider for all patients. Before having a test, one should always contemplate what the approach will be depending upon the outcome of the test. Dr. Ross advises, If a person is determined to go through a particular course regardless of the outcome, we would suggest not being tested in the first place.