

INTRODUCTION

Breast cancer is the most common type of cancer in Western women. It is a leading cause of cancer death, second only to lung cancer. Simply being a woman and getting older puts you at risk for breast cancer. Breast cancer represents a malignant proliferation of epithelial cells lining the ducts or lobules of the breast (Fig. 1). Breast cancer is a clonal disease. That is, a single transformed cell – the end result of a series of somatic (acquired) or germline (inherited) mutations – is able to express full malignant potential, in a series of events that occur in a sequential and stochastic manner. Thus, breast cancer may exist for a long period as either a noninvasive disease or an invasive but non-metastatic disease. This fact makes the need for timely diagnosis and appropriate management more urgent.