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NEWS

RSNA Press Release

Annual Reminder Needed for Mammography

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At A Glance

- The healthcare industry is not reminding enough women to have annual mammograms.
- Annual mammograms lead to early detection of breast cancers, when they are most curable and breast-conservation therapies are available.
- The percentage of women having mammograms is on the rise, but one in three American women over age 40 has not had a mammogram in the last two years.

NEW YORK CITY - Healthcare providers need to take the initiative and encourage all women over age 40 to have annual mammograms, according to Stephen A. Feig, M.D., who helped develop the 2003 American Cancer Society guidelines on breast cancer screenings.

"If dentists can send out postcards for teeth cleanings, women should also receive reminders for annual screening mammography," asked Dr. Feig, professor of radiology at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York. "We need to get the word out to more women."

Dr. Feig spoke today at a Radiological Society of North America (RSNA) media briefing on women's breast health. A Swedish study showed death rates from breast cancer have dropped by as much as 50 percent because of mammography, yet one in three American women over 40 has not had a mammogram during the last two years.

Dr. Feig said fear, misinformation and controversy surrounding mammography are discouraging women from making annual appointments. He is calling on primary caregivers, women's health specialists, radiologists and oncologists to assist in a massive education effort.

"The mammogram is the best screening tool available today for detecting breast cancer early, when it is most treatable," Dr. Feig said. "We offer women much better mammography today than we did for their mothers and grandmothers."

Dr. Feig also encouraged women to continue having a yearly mammogram regardless of their advancing age. The American Cancer Society guidelines have no upper age limit for mammography. Dr. Feig said that as long as a woman is in reasonably good health and would benefit from early cancer detection, she should continue to be screened with mammography.

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"The breast cancers we are finding today are much smaller than they were years ago," Dr. Feig said. "This means that they are easier to cure and there is a greater choice of therapeutic options for women, including breast conservation."

Dr. Feig pointed to some other signs that improvements are being made in mammography:

- Among women age 40 and older in the United States, 70 percent have had mammograms during the last two years, compared with 67 percent in 1998 and 29 percent in 1987, as reported in a 2003 study.
- Swedish researchers concluded in 2002 that the impact of organized mammography was responsible for reducing breast cancer deaths by 50 percent.
- In 2002 the American Cancer Society convened an expert panel to review results of clinical trials and other new evidence related to the screening mammogram, including reports that challenged the value of mammography; the panel concluded that research continues to show a significant mortality reduction due to mammography screening.
- Twenty to 40 percent of all breast cancers detected at screening today are ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS), which was rarely detected until the advent of mammography.

"Our challenge now is to meet an increasing demand for mammography as the population of women over the age of 40 increases," Dr. Feig said.

The Radiological Society of North America is an association of more than 35,000 radiologists, radiation oncologists and related scientists committed to promoting excellence in radiology through education and by fostering research, with the ultimate goal of improving patient care. The Society is based in Oak Brook, Ill. (http://www.rsna.org)

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