

New Screening Guidelines are Harmful to Women's Health

The Annals of Internal Medicine, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommended radical changes in the clinical guidelines for screening mammography. These include:

1. Screening mammography should not be done routinely for all women age 40-49 years.
2. Women aged 50-74 years should have mammography every two years.
3. There is not enough evidence to recommend for or against screening mammography after age 74 years.

The Society of Breast Imaging, American College of Radiology, and American Cancer Society have issued statements strongly opposing these guidelines.

The Breast Imagers of Diversified Radiology including myself also strongly oppose these recommendations.

While the incidence of breast cancer is lower in women in their 40's compared to women overall the benefits of screening mammography are actually higher for them. Studies have shown that the risk of dying has been reduced as much as 30-45% in this age group. The USPSTF has concluded that because there are fewer women diagnosed in their 40's the cost to screen for these cancers outweighs the benefits for these women.

For the last two decades there has been a decline in Breast Cancer mortality that has been directly linked to the implementation of current screening guidelines. These guidelines specifically changed screening from two years to every year and started screening women at an earlier age. What the USPSTF is recommending is a complete reversal of the advances we have made.

Women will die unnecessarily because of these new recommendations. The highest increase of breast cancer has been seen in women under 50. In some of our Colorado locations the diagnosis of breast cancer in women under 50 has been as high as 37% of the population screened. Breast Cancer is the most common cancer in women and the second leading cause of death in women overall and the leading cause of death in young women. This has been attributed to tumors being more aggressive in younger age groups.

The goal of screening is to find small nonpalpable tumors in order to have the best outcome. These guidelines will allow more time between mammograms and therefore more women will come in when they are symptomatic and with larger tumors. They will diminish our ability to identify breast cancer in its earliest

stages which most successfully leads to a cure. These guidelines will directly affect their survival and increase their chances of dying from the disease.

The USPSTF is going against all of the scientific data that has been gathered and published in the last 30 years that is responsible for the decrease in Breast Cancer Mortality seen today.

As a Breast Imager and physician I again stress the importance of the current American Cancer Society guidelines of getting regular mammograms beginning at age 40 and continuing yearly screening.