



Main Line HealthCare
Physician Network



Surprise Recommendations for Mammography Screening

By Andrea V. Barrio, MD

Main Line HealthCare Breast Surgical Specialists

As Breast Cancer Awareness Month draws near (October), I think it is a good time to reflect on some of the issues that have been at the forefront of the media this past year. Breast cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed among women with approximately 200,000 new cases diagnosed each year. In addition, despite our advances in screening and treatment, it remains the second most common cause of death among women with approximately 40,000 breast cancer deaths per year.

At a time when we should be looking to find ways to reduce our mortality from breast cancer, we were faced with surprising recommendations from the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) regarding screening mammography. They recommended against screening mammography for women aged 40-49, stating that the “risks” of screening mammography in this age group, specifically the higher false positive rate, outweighed the “benefits”. These “benefits” include a 15% reduction in mortality from breast cancer with annual screening in these young women, which in my opinion, is worth a few extra benign biopsies. The USPSTF also recommended bi-annual screening for women ages 50-74, with no clear screening recommendation for women aged 75 and older. Both the American Cancer Society and the American Society of Breast Surgeons (ASBS) are strongly opposed to these recommendations. I think the ASBS said it best in their position statement when they stated that “...these recommendations **effectively turn back the clock to pre-mammography days** by making the diagnosis of breast cancer occur only when the tumor is large enough to be felt on a physical exam...”

As October gets closer, let’s be advocates for our patients and enforce that screening mammography starting at the age of 40 saves lives and reduces morbidity associated with more extensive surgery and treatment.