Why is it important to have a yearly screening mammogram beginning at age 40?

In November of 2009, the United States Preventative Services Task Force, a government panel sponsored by the Department of Health and Human Services, announced their updated recommendations for breast cancer screening, advising not to screen women ages 40-49. According to Dr. Lance P. Trigg, a radiologist and breast specialist at Radiology Associates of Ocala, most experts agree people have made these recommendations with no expertise in breast cancer diagnosis and treatment, using obsolete data. The panel admitted that there has been a 30% reduction in breast cancer mortality since screening began in 1990, and lives would be lost if these measures were enacted, but the advantages of early detection were overshadowed by the cost and anxiety created by false positive exams. Dr. Trigg states that the gratitude expressed by patients when a cancer is detected early or when a suspicious finding is proven negative, outweighs any anxiety incurred during the evaluation. The American Cancer Society, the American Board of Radiology, the Society of Breast Imaging, and The American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology all agree that screening should remain as an annual exam, starting at age 40.

For an excellent overview of current recommendations visit the American Cancer Society website - www.cancer.org.

What is a digital mammogram versus a regular mammogram?

Mammography is a highly sensitive x-ray of the breast using very low levels of radiation to diagnose breast abnormalities and cancer at its earliest stages, before it can be felt or cause symptoms.

A recent advancement in mammography is digital mammography. For the patient, having a digital mammogram is essentially the same experience as having a regular mammogram, although digital mammography offers advantages that traditional film based mammography does not. Advantages include improved contrast of breast tissue, faster image acquisition with lower radiation dose, shorter exam times, and electronic image storage. In addition, digital mammography allows physicians the ability to manipulate images of the breasts for improved detection of breast cancer.

What should I look for in a breast imaging center?

Researching a breast imaging center is important to you and your health. There are several things you can look for when deciding where to go for your yearly mammogram and other breast imaging needs. It is important to research the following:
Is it a full service breast imaging center?
As a patient it’s important to know the breast imaging center you choose not only offers mammography, but also offers follow-up procedure you may need (i.e. ultrasound-guided breast biopsy, breast MRI, PET/CT). This will allow for comprehensive care without having to change facilities or transfer patient information.

Who is interpreting your mammogram?
The physician who interprets your study matters to you and your health. Be sure your radiologist is local and is available for questions should you or your referring doctor need to follow-up with him or her. It is important the radiologist(s) are Board Certified in diagnostic radiology. Furthermore, feel free to ask if the radiologists have had additional training in breast imaging.

Is the facility accredited?
It is required by law that any imaging center offering mammography be accredited in mammography by the American College of Radiology. To take it one step further, an elite 5% of all breast imaging centers in Florida have earned the designation as Breast Imaging Center of Excellence. This credential demonstrates excellence in breast imaging and is awarded to facilities who offer comprehensive imaging from mammography to stereotactic breast biopsy, breast ultrasound and ultrasound-guided breast biopsy. Furthermore, facilities that have this designation have gone through a rigorous review process. If they have this credential, it adds assurance that the imaging center you chose has worked hard to provide the utmost in quality breast imaging care.

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