

STUDY CONFIRMS MAMMOGRAPHY LOWERS BREAST CANCER DEATH RATE IN WOMEN 40-49

On September 29, 2010, the American Cancer Society published a landmark mammography study in their online journal *Cancer* that proves that annual mammography screening of women in their 40s reduces the breast cancer death rate in these women by nearly 30 percent. The results of this largest study ever conducted on women in this age group confirm that the use of the age of 50 as a threshold for breast cancer screening is scientifically unfounded. Women should begin getting annual mammograms at age 40.

“This study, which looked at the performance of screening mammography as it is actually used, rather than relying on mathematical modeling, shows without a doubt that mammography decreases deaths from breast cancer in women aged 40-49 by nearly one third. There is no excuse not to recommend that average risk women begin annual screening mammography at age 40,” said Carol H. Lee, MD, chair of the American College of Radiology Breast Imaging Commission.

In November 2009, the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) ignored published data showing a similar death rate reduction to this landmark trial and withdrew support for screening women 40-49. This real-world study is far more robust, based on real-world numbers, and proves that the benefit is nearly twice that of the USPSTF original estimate of 15 percent.

“This study shows that annual mammograms for women 40 and over result in a tremendously significant reduction in the breast cancer death rate for women 40-49. The age of 50 is an artificial threshold that has no basis in scientific fact. The debate is now over. Women should no longer be confused about the importance of annual breast cancer screening. If you are a woman age 40 or over, one of them could be yours,” said Phil Evans, MD, president of the Society of Breast Imaging (SBI).

The Swedish trial followed more than 600,000 women for 16 years. The number of breast cancer deaths among the women in the study who did not receive mammograms was twice as high as those who underwent screening. Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women worldwide and kills approximately 465,000 people globally each year. Screening mammography can catch cancer early—when it is most treatable. While not a perfect test, at present, there is no other screening tool to replace it.

“It is now time to stop confusing women with conflicting information. Mammography is a lifesaver for women in their 40s. What providers need to do now is uniformly confirm for women that they need to start getting annual mammograms beginning at age 40 and work to build on the ability of mammography to detect cancer early, when it is most treatable. Mammography saves a significant number of lives in all women 40 and over. Let’s all move forward from there,” said Gail Lebovic, MD, breast surgeon and president of the American Society of Breast Disease (ASBD).

CITATION: Hellquist BN, Duffy SW, Abdsaleh S, et al. Effectiveness of population-based service screening with mammography for women ages 40 to 49 years: evaluation of the Swedish Mammography Screening in Young Women (SCRY) cohort. *Cancer*. 2010 Sep 29. [Epub ahead of print] doi: 10.1002/cncr.25650

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About Kerry E. Chandler, MD

As the director of breast imaging for Wake Radiology, Dr. Chandler has also served as secretary/treasurer of Johnston Memorial Hospital in Smithfield, NC, from 1995-2010. She is board certified by the American Board of Radiology, and she has been with Wake Radiology since 1997. A native of northern New Jersey, Dr. Chandler received her medical training at Rutgers University’s Robert Wood Johnson Medical School in Camden, NJ. She completed her residency at Cooper Hospital, University Medical Center, in Morristown, NJ, and a fellowship in MRI-neuroradiology at Albany Medical Center in New York. Dr. Chandler is a member of the American College of Radiology, the Radiological Society of North America, the North Carolina Medical Society, and the Wake County Medical Society.



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A MESSAGE TO OUR FEMALE PATIENTS

In the letters we send to women reminding them to schedule their annual screening mammogram, we address the USPSTF guidelines with an updated insert that details the positive findings of the latest Swedish mammography study (cited above). We want women to understand what this task force is recommending and give them the latest information about this imaging modality to educate them about these guidelines and weigh the risks involved in increasing the screening mammogram to every two years and in discontinuing their monthly self exams. We hope you’ll encourage women to be aware of their breast health, understand their risks, and make informed decisions. We welcome any questions you or your patients may have about this very important issue.

