



WOMEN'S HEALTH

Breaking The Barriers Access To Early Detection Of Breast Cancer

(NAPSA)—With all the focus on women and health these days, what is it that prevents women from really taking care of their own health? With all the evidence that suggests early detection of breast cancer can be instrumental in saving lives, why would women forgo getting a routine mammogram? What's more, with information available on the benefits of early detection that show there may be less need for invasive treatment and better outcomes, why do women seem to ignore the facts?

There are several reasons. Four of the top barriers to early detection of breast cancer are lack of insurance or financial resources to pay for mammograms and obtain a clinical breast examination; believing that if you are over 65 you do not need a mammogram; thinking that you are not at risk because breast cancer does not "run in your family"; believing that the results of a mammogram will be breast cancer and avoiding the test.

The facts are:

- medically underserved women can find places offering no cost mammograms by contacting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at 1-888-842-6355 for places offering free mammography screening. Medicare and Medicaid both reimburse for mammography; and on National Mammography Day, many facilities around the country offer low or no cost mammography screening.

- women over 65 should receive routine mammography screening and clinical breast exams because risk increases with age, and therefore, early detection is more important than ever if you are an older woman. In fact, the average age at diagnosis is 63 years of age. Women, especially in this age group, should talk to their physicians and be sure to schedule a mammogram and clinical breast exam.

- only five to 10 percent of all breast cancers can be attributed to inherited genetic mutations. Most women diagnosed with breast cancer do not have a family history of this disease. Therefore, beginning



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when a woman is 40 years old, routine mammography and a clinical breast exam is strongly recommended by most health care organizations. Women 20 and older should practice monthly breast self-examination and report any unusual changes in their breasts to their healthcare provider.

- while fear of finding breast cancer is a motivating factor for many in not obtaining a mammogram, in fact more than half the time breast cancer found via mammography is found at early, more treatable stages. Early detection of this disease leads to earlier treatment when the tumor is still small and requires less invasive procedures.

Education about options for breast health is important. Women should be informed so that they can make educated choices about breast health. Resources such as the National Breast Cancer Awareness Month Campaign provide information on its Web site, www.nbcam.org. The site searches the sites of the Board of Sponsors, a group of 19 national public service organizations, professional associations and government agencies including the American Cancer Society, the National Cancer Institute and the AstraZeneca Healthcare Foundation. The most up-to-date and accurate information on breast cancer, as well as links to patient advocacy, medical, professional and government organizations are available on the Web site.



Editors' Note: Although October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, this story may be used at any time.