



WOMEN'S HEALTH

Breast Self-Exam Too Valuable To Discard, Experts Say

(NAPSA)—According to many medical experts, breast self-exam (BSE) plays a supporting—but crucial—role in the early detection of breast cancer.

The renewed advocacy for BSE from the public health community comes in response to a recent *Canadian Medical Association Journal* article which reported that the practice does more harm than good.

In the article, lead author Nancy Baxter, MD, asserts that there is “no evidence that BSE... reduces death from breast cancer” and indicates that it can cause unnecessary anxiety and unneeded biopsies.

American Cancer Society Director of Screening Robert Smith, PhD, for one, strongly disagrees. “There is considerable evidence suggesting a benefit,” he says.

Smith explains that BSE helps women under 40 learn what their breasts feel like normally—so they can become sensitive to changes and can alert their doctor to signs of danger—and provides a safety net for women over 40 whose cancers are missed by mammography.

Similarly, the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation warns that the study, which recommends abandoning BSE, endangers women by encouraging them to rely more heavily on mammograms, which aren't always accurate.



For many women, breast self-exams can help catch cancer in its earliest stages.

Likewise, Harvard Medical School's Larissa Nekhlyudov, MD, says, “Our view is that the recommendation is premature.” She points out that the five-year study was too short to determine the efficacy of any screening technique. Studies of mammography, which decreases the breast cancer death rate by up to 60 percent, would have shown no health benefits after five years.

Experts agree we must continue to seek better breast cancer screening methods—along with

improved treatments and a deeper understanding of the potential causes and how to prevent it.

Until new technologies become available, however, most maintain the three-pronged approach—mammography, BSE and clinical breast examinations—represents the best way to find cancers in the earliest stage, when the survival rate is 96 percent.

This year, during National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, you can help advance research to improve breast cancer early detection and treatment by participating in the American Cancer Society's Making Strides Against Breast Cancer, held at 80 sites around the country. To learn more, call 800-ACS-2345.

American Cancer Society Guidelines for Breast Cancer Early Detection

Ages 20-39

- Clinical breast exam by a doctor or nurse every three years
- Monthly breast self-exam

Ages 40 and older

- Annual mammography
- Annual clinical breast exam by a doctor or nurse (done close to the time of the mammography)
- Monthly breast self-exam

