

Federal Guidelines Ignore Dangers of Mammography

By: Dr. V. Siedlecki

Screening mammography poses significant and cumulative risks of radiation, particularly for pre-menopausal women, of which women remain uninformed. The routine practice of taking four films of each breast annually results in approximately 1 rad (radiation absorbed dose) exposure.

This is about 1,000 times greater than exposure from a chest x-ray which is broadly focused on the entire chest rather than narrowly on the breast. The pre-menopausal breast is highly sensitive to radiation, each 1 rad exposure increases breast cancer risk by about 1 percent, with a cumulative 10 percent increased risk for each breast over a decade's screening.

Radiation risks are further increased, by some four-fold, for the 1 to 2 percent of women who are unknowing silent carriers of the A-T (ataxia-telangiectasia) gene. By some estimates, this accounts for up to 20 percent of all breast cancers diagnosed annually. All these risks are greater for women in their thirties who are being encouraged to undergo "baseline screening," for which there is no evidence of any future relevance.

In addition to the cumulative damage incurred from the mammographic penetrating radiation, cancer cells, if present in the breast as a tumor, can possibly be spread from being squashed in the mammogram machine. As for "early detection," the malignant tumor disclosed by a mammogram is, on average, seven or eight years old already!

Do alternatives to mammography exist? The answer is yes and no. Existing alternatives are not embraced by establishment medicine and are generally unavailable to the public.

Cancer researcher Georg Springer MD has developed a harmless skin test that can disclose breast cancer using the body's own antigens that can detect it up to six years earlier than a mammogram can. Developed years ago, this accurate test remains unavailable to women.

Somewhat more available is thermography, a means of detecting breast cancer by measurement of subtle differences in breast skin temperature. As a malignant tumor is warmer than surrounding tissue because of the higher metabolic activity in fast-growing tissue, modern thermal imaging technology can disclose these relative hot spots remotely without harming or even touching the patient.

In choosing not to cover thermography, insurance companies keep this safe and effective screening procedure unavailable to most women.

If women were made aware of the available alternative to mammography, one that detected cancer earlier, harmlessly and with no discomfort, how many would choose it? What would become of all the existing mammogram machines and the people who operate them? I believe we have a widespread conflict of interest, namely the income stream generated by mammography.

There is a proper place for mammography. For example, a thermogram cannot locate the precise position of a tumor once disclosed, but a mammogram can. X-rays are a wonderful medical tool; but, considering the damage they always do, they should not be used on a medical fishing expedition to find disease in otherwise healthy people. There is now a better path to breast cancer screening.

In Summary:

1. Mammograms Save Lives

Yes, yes, yes. I hear it all the time too: "My mammogram saved my life!" However, statistically, breast cancer mortality is the same for those who have had mammograms as those who have not had them.

2. Mammograms Catch Cancer In It's Early Stages

They do not, and the number of false positives and false negatives seem to really mess up women's lives. Mammography can find only advanced tumors.

3. Mammograms Are Safe

They can cause cancer. They cause existing tumors to spread. William Campbell Douglass, M.D., has said: "I find it maddeningly contradictory that medical students are taught to examine breasts gently to keep any possible cancer from spreading, yet radiologists are allowed to manhandle them for a mammogram."

4. Mammograms Are the Most Dependable Breast Cancer Screening Method

Far from it! There are safer methods and more dependable methods. The NCI estimates that the risk of a false positive is about 40% which leads to unnecessary biopsies, mastectomies, lumpectomies, and radiation (which can damage your cardiovascular health).