



# *The Breast Health Task Force*

AT THE CHESTER COUNTY HOSPITAL

## **AN UPDATE on Mammogram Screening Recommendations**

**All women are encouraged to follow the American Cancer Society's (ACS) recommendation to begin annual screening mammograms at the age of 40.**

We understand there has been some confusion since the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force released a drastically different screening recommendation from the standard that we have been following. This change in recommendation, however, was based on older mammography technology, and **does NOT apply to digital mammography**. Since August of 2008, all mammograms performed at The Chester County Hospital (and its satellite offices) are digital.

Mammography is the optimal screening tool for the early diagnosis of breast cancer. Most specialty Societies have released statements in support of the continuation of annual mammograms for all women beginning at the age of 40. These include the American College of Surgeons, the American College of Obstetrician's and Gynecologists, and the American College of Radiology, the Society of Breast Imaging, and the American Society of Breast Surgeons.

There are some women who are at increased risk for breast cancer because of family history, prior biopsy abnormality, or prior exposure to radiation who should start their screening at an earlier age. There is no set age at which women should stop having mammograms. Women should continue having mammograms as long as they are in good health and are physically able.

The rationale for the recommendations set forth by the US Preventive Services Task Force was attributed to the perceived potential harm screening mammography can have on women under the age of 50, specifically: psychological harm (i.e. stress), unnecessary imaging tests and biopsies, inconvenience due to false positive screening results and overdiagnosis/overtreatment for cancers which would not affect a woman's life expectancy. Based on the open discussions among various medical societies, women's groups and in the media, it would appear that these concerns are not shared by many.

To date, The Chester County Hospital is not aware of any change in insurance coverage for mammography, and the federal government has already taken steps to prevent this. In December 2009, the Senate approved an amendment to its health care overhaul bill that effectively nullifies the new guidelines and ensures mammography coverage for women starting at the age of 40.

All women are encouraged to contact their health care provider to discuss their optimal mammography schedule.

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