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## **Effectiveness of Client Reminder Interventions to Promote Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening in Communities and Health Care Systems**

For women over 50, the benefits of screening for breast cancer through mammography are clear. For women ages 40-49, the evidence that screening mammography reduces mortality from breast cancer is weaker, and the absolute benefit of mammography is smaller than for older women. The benefits of Pap smear testing for women over 21 from screening for cervical cancer are also clear. However, despite the existence of these tests and the fact they are readily available at little or no charge, utilization rates are below expected levels, especially among women in some minority groups and among low income women who may not have regular medical care. The question is then, what are effective strategies to promote increased use of breast and cervical cancer screening

A systematic review of published studies, conducted on behalf of the Task Force on Community Preventive Services by a team of experts, found strong evidence that client reminders were effective in increasing screening for breast and cervical cancer and therefore recommended their implementation.

### **Background on client reminder interventions to promote breast and cervical cancer screening**

- Reminders advise persons in communities or health care systems that they are due or late for a particular screening
- Reminders vary in form and content and may include:
  - letters
  - postcards
  - telephone calls
- Reminders may simply state that a client is due for a screening or may include additional information, which may include text about the importance of screening or pamphlets (i.e. small media) about the benefits and risks screening.
- Letter reminders may include pre-scheduled appointments
- Reminders may or may not be tailored to fit the individual's risk profile

### **Findings from the systematic review**

- In its review of available studies on the effectiveness of this intervention, 48 studies were identified that addressed the effectiveness of breast and cervical cancer screening
- 25 of the 48 studies reviewed dealt with breast cancer screening and were found by the Task Force to be of the highest quality and were therefore the basis for the Task Force's recommendation. The median effect size or positive improvement in delivery of breast cancer screening was 11% (range 2-16%)
- 13 of the 48 studies dealt with cervical cancer screening and were found to be of highest quality and were therefore the basis for the Task Force recommendation. The median effect size or improvement in the delivery of cervical cancer screening was 10.3 % (range 6.3-17%)
- Reminders for breast and cervical cancer were shown to be effective across a range of settings including rural and urban, HMO and private practice as well as among a range of clients including predominately Caucasian, predominantly African-American and multi-ethnic populations.
- There was sparse cost effectiveness information available.
- While continued research on the overall effectiveness of reminders for breast and cervical cancer screening is not encouraged, research questions that may warrant further study include:
  - Do reminders for cancer screening increase or reduce the delivery of other preventive services?
  - How can reminders be implemented with minimal administrative burden placed on providers or systems?

### **Publications:**

- **MMWR/Recommendations and Reports** – August 22, 2003/Vol. 52/No. RR-13. A summary report on findings.

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**The Guide to Community Preventive Services** (Community Guide) provides recommendations on population-based interventions to promote health and to prevent disease, injury, disability, and premature death, appropriate for use by communities and healthcare systems. For more information about the Community Guide (including links to publications and a variety of resources) see

[www.thecommunityguide.org](http://www.thecommunityguide.org) and for more information about Task Force findings on skin cancer prevention see [www.thecommunityguide.org/cancer/](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/cancer/)

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