

Title:

Is There A Preferred Way To Detect Breast Cancer? Both Digital And X-Ray Film Mammograms Can Help Save Lives

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Summary:

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Keywords:

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Article Body:

In 2006, more than 250,000 U.S. women will be diagnosed with breast cancer. This deadly disease will claim the lives of more than 40,000 friends, neighbors, mothers and daughters. These are staggering statistics.

However, breast cancer death rates are going down. This decline is largely attributed to the benefits of annual mammograms that enable physicians to detect cancer at its earliest stages, and improved treatment programs that help patients better manage their cancer.

Both digital and film-based mammography can identify breast disease in women who may have no obvious signs of breast cancer. Historically, mammograms have been conducted using medical X-ray film. Now, new digital imaging technologies are emerging that offer a complementary method for early detection of breast cancer.

The arrival of more digital imaging options sometimes can cause some patients to "wait it out" until their health care provider installs digital imaging systems. But the advice from physicians appears to be overwhelming: Do not wait for the latest digital technology. One of the most critical aspects for a full recovery is early detection, and it is far better to have any kind of mammogram than to delay or skip a mammogram entirely. The decision on which imaging technology to use should be a secondary issue that patients can discuss with their physicians.

"Digital technologies show great promise in helping to detect breast cancer in

certain patients," said Dr. John M. Lewin, Diversified Radiology of Colorado, a leader in providing technologically advanced radiology imaging. "In fact, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is considering relaxing guidelines that may make it easier for manufacturers of digital mammography systems to bring new products to market faster."

Should the FDA adopt revised guidelines, it is possible that health care providers and patients could have access to a broader range of new digital mammography products earlier-and perhaps at a lower cost-as more competition among manufacturers may drive down prices of these systems.

One of the innovators of digital medical imaging systems is Eastman Kodak Company, which currently markets a digital mammography system for use in Europe, Latin America, Asia and other parts of the world. Kodak has applied to the FDA for approval to market this system in the U.S. and the company is conducting clinical trials of this system in the U.S. and Canada. "We applaud the FDA for examining ways to streamline the approval process for digital mammography products that may lead to increased adoption and improved access to these innovative systems," said Michael Marsh, vice president, Kodak's Health Group.

Given the benefits and improvements in both digital and film mammogram technology, there is more reason now than ever before to encourage mothers, grandmothers, sisters and friends to get an annual mammogram.

The American Cancer Society continues to recommend the importance of mammograms as a highly effective tool in the detection of breast cancer. What is critical is not the technology used to produce a mammogram, but ensuring that women age 40 and older have regular mammograms as part of maintaining a healthy lifestyle.