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Mammograms Saves Lives

Almost everyone one of us either have a family member, friend, or acquaintance that has experienced breast cancer. Many women do not take measures to detect early signs of this disease. The following article by Cheryl Brewer, Extension Assistant for Texas AgriLife Extension Service reminds us of the importance of mammograms and how they save lives.

Mammograms can cut breast cancer deaths as much as 1/3. That is why the American Cancer Society recommends women aged 40 and older be screened for breast cancer with a mammogram once a year. A mammogram is an x-ray of the breast. It is the best method used to detect breast cancer early and prevent death since the cancer is easier to treat at that point. Using a mammogram for breast cancer screening can reduce death from breast cancer by about 20-35% in women aged 50-69 years old.

Due to education about breast cancer, more women are getting mammograms, and the death rate has gone down. However, low income, rural women are at greater risk for dying from breast cancer since fewer of them get mammograms. There are a variety of reasons why low income, rural women may not be getting mammograms. Among them is the fact that they may not have easy access to mammogram screening facilities. Another reason is the cost keeps them away. Others may just want to avoid the chance they may find out that they have breast cancer.

Unfortunately, as women get older, their chance of developing breast cancer increases. With increasing age, it becomes even more important to be screened regularly. While screenings may not be as readily available in some rural areas, it is often available in nearby medical centers. Find out if a local hospital does breast screenings. If not, contact a larger urban hospital and inquire if they have mobile mammography units that go out into your rural community, and when and where they will be in your area. For individuals who may not have transportation to medical services, check to see if your area might have a service to transport rural citizens to urban locations that provide more services. There may be a fee for their service, but that fee may be waived for persons who meet certain income requirements.

If cost is a factor, check with your local clinic and inquire if they offer the Breast and Cervical Cancer Service (BCCS) program. This is a program the Centers for Disease Control funds to assist low income women. To qualify for the program, a woman must be low-income as defined by BCCS policy, uninsured, under age 65, a Texas resident, and a U.S. citizen or qualified alien. To find out if you qualify for a free or low-cost mammogram and Pap test and where to get screened in your area, call 1-512-458-7796. For women over age 65 and some who may be specially qualified, know that screening mammograms are covered once every 12 months.

If you are an individual who just does not want to know if you have breast cancer, remember that early detection does save lives. The death rate for breast cancer is greater among low-income, rural women as a whole because they are the ones not getting mammograms.

Texas AgriLife Extension Service and the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas are working together to inform Texas women about breast cancer prevention. For more information on how to access resources and to schedule a mammogram in this area, call the Texas AgriLife Extension Service office at 903/473-5000, ext. 157.

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