

Women's Health Alert: Are your patients getting their mammograms?

Screening mammography can reduce mortality from breast cancer in women who are asymptomatic and at average risk for the disease.¹ Although guidelines for age of first screening and interval may differ,² the importance of screening remains the same: to detect cancer at an earlier stage when the patient's treatment options and chances of survival are higher. In addition to ordering mammograms, please consider potential barriers that may be impacting your patients' adherence to your screening recommendations.

Thank you for joining us in the effort to increase breast cancer screening rates in Texas.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), breast cancer continues to be the second leading cause of cancer death among American women overall and the leading cause of cancer death for Hispanic women in the U.S. Additionally, according to the CDC, the risk of getting breast cancer has not changed overall in the past 10 years – one in every eight women will be diagnosed with breast cancer over the course of a lifetime – the risk has increased for African-American, Asian, and Pacific Islander women in the U.S.³

For the current year, the American Cancer Society estimates that 266,120 women in the U.S. will be diagnosed with breast cancer and about 40,920 women will die from this type of cancer. In Texas, it is estimated that 18,260 cases of breast cancer will be diagnosed in 2018, resulting in an estimated 2,880 deaths.⁴ The incidence rate for breast cancer was 112 new cases per 100,000 women in Texas.⁵

Breast cancer is a serious, potentially life-changing disease, and early detection is vital to increasing each patient's chances for survival. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Texas (BCBSTX) values your diligence in encouraging your patients to get mammograms and other recommended screenings according to the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) guidelines.* But it doesn't end there, because the message may not be reaching certain populations, or if it is, some individuals may not be taking appropriate action.

Early detection is the road to life after breast cancer. BCBSTX has identified areas of opportunity for increased awareness among some of our members, based on claims data. For example, breast cancer screening rates among members are lagging, despite ongoing member education and outreach efforts. You may be ordering mammograms, but there may be several factors that may be preventing some of your patients from following through on their doctors' orders. We are seeking your help to bridge the gap.

What are the potential barriers preventing members from getting mammograms?

When talking with your patients, it's important to recognize potential disparities in breast cancer screening, particularly among some minority populations. The Susan G. Komen® website compares mammography screening rates among different groups of people and offers **several** points to consider.⁶

- **Lack of Awareness** – Some women may not be aware of the importance of routine screening. They may not be aware their risk increases with age. If diagnosed, they may not understand the importance of acting quickly.

- **Cost Concerns** – Patients in low-income households may be concerned about taking time off from work for doctors' appointments. They may not think they can afford screening or treatment.
- **Limited Access** – A patient may make it to an annual visit, but it may be hard to arrange for additional visits such as a screening, or other follow-up appointments. There may not be a screening facility close to where the patient lives or works. They may not have transportation.
- **Fear** – Some patients may be worried that screening will be painful, dangerous or ineffective. They may be apprehensive about results. They may be afraid their insurance will not cover **treatment** if it becomes necessary.
- **Lack of Support** – Some patients may be serving as primary caregivers for children or other family members. They may not feel they have anyone else to help if they need to make their own health top priority.

What can you do to help?

Some members may need more than a written order for screening. Here are some suggestions to help make sure your patients follow through:

- **Offer to make the appointment for your patient.** Print instructions and circle important details. Make sure patients have a number to call if they have questions.
- **Talk about potential costs.** Remind patients they can call the number on their member ID card for additional information regarding their health care benefits.
- **Make sure your patients understand.** Ask questions, such as: Do you understand why screening is important? When are you going? Where are you going? Do you have transportation? Are there any reasons that may prevent you from keeping your appointment?
- **Encourage your patients to learn more.** Direct them to additional resources for information and support.
- **Follow up after your patients leave your office.** Call or mail a letter to confirm your patient completed their screening.

Additional Resources for Providers

Many organizations offer excellent resources. Here are just a few examples to consider:

- **American Cancer Society** – [Tools for Health Care Professionals](#)
- **Susan G. Komen Foundation** – [Breast Cancer Education Toolkit for Hispanic/Latino Communities](#)
- **Texas Comprehensive Cancer Control Program (Sponsored by the Texas Department of State Health Services)** - <http://www.dshs.texas.gov/tccp/Texas-Comprehensive-Cancer-Control-Program-Educational-Resources.aspx>

Additional Resources for Members

BCBSTX conducts member education campaigns to help increase awareness of preventive care opportunities, such as scheduling annual routine physical exams. Reminders about mammograms and other important topics also are published on our public [LifeTimes®](#) health and wellness site.

Other resources you may wish to share with your patients include:

- **CDC** – The [Breast Cancer: What You Need to Know](#) fact sheet provides a quick overview of important details such as risk factors and symptoms.
- **Susan G. Komen** – Patients may visit ww5.komen.org to learn more about screening and sign up for reminders. Patients also may contact the Breast Care Helpline at 877-465-6636 or helpline@komen.org for breast health and breast cancer information or free, professional support services.

^{1,2} USPSTF, [Final Recommendation Statement, Breast Cancer Screening](#)

³ Basic Information About Breast Cancer, CDC, June 13, 2018, https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/basic_info/index.htm

⁴ Cancer Statistics Center, American Cancer Society, <https://cancerstatisticscenter.cancer.org>

⁵ Cancer in Texas 2018 Female Breast Cancer Fact Sheet — Texas, April 2018, <http://www.dshs.texas.gov/tcccp/FactSheets/?terms=breast%20cancer>

⁶ Comparing Breast Cancer Screening Rates Among Different Groups, Susan G. Komen, April 25, 2018, <https://ww5.komen.org/BreastCancer/RacialEthnicIssuesinScreening.html>

**Note: There are multiple guidelines for breast cancer screening. In addition to USPSTF guidelines, also refer to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) [Statement on Breast Cancer Screening Guidelines](#), and the American Cancer Society [Recommendations for the Early Detection of Breast Cancer](#).*

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