# American Cancer Society Responds to Changes to USPSTF Mammography Guidelines

## The American Cancer Society guidelines will not change; annual mammography recommended for women 40 and over

Atlanta 2009/11/16 -November 16, 2009—The United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) today announced that it is changing its guidelines for mammography and no longer recommends routine screening for women between the ages of 40 and 49. Below is a statement from Otis W. Brawley, M.D., chief medical officer, American Cancer Society.

“The American Cancer Society continues to recommend annual screening using mammography and clinical breast examination for all women beginning at age 40. Our experts make this recommendation having reviewed virtually all the same data reviewed by the USPSTF, but also additional data that the USPSTF did not consider. When recommendations are based on judgments about the balance of risks and benefits, reasonable experts can look at the same data and reach different conclusions.

“In 2003, an expert panel convened by the American Cancer Society conducted an extensive review of the data available at the time, which was not substantially different from the data included in the current USPSTF review. Like the USPSTF, the Society’s panel found convincing evidence that screening with mammography reduces breast cancer mortality in women ages 40-74, with age-specific benefits varying depending on the results of individual trials and which trials were combined in meta-analyses. And like the USPSTF, the American Cancer Society panel also found that mammography has limitations – some women who are screened will have false alarms; some cancers will be missed; and some women will undergo unnecessary treatment. These limitations are somewhat greater in women in their forties compared with women in their fifties, and somewhat greater in women in their fifties compared with women in their sixties. We specifically noted that the overall effectiveness of mammography increases with increasing age. But the limitations do not change the fact that breast cancer screening using mammography starting at age 40 saves lives. “As someone who has long been a critic of those overstating the benefits of screening, I use these words advisedly: this is one screening test I recommend unequivocally, and would recommend to any woman 40 and over, be she a patient, a stranger, or a family member.

“The USPSTF says that screening 1,339 women in their 50s to save one life makes screening worthwhile in that age group. Yet USPSTF also says screening 1,904 women ages 40 to 49 in order to save one life is not worthwhile. The American Cancer Society feels that in both cases, the lifesaving benefits of screening outweigh any potential harms. Surveys of women show that they are aware of these limitations, and also place high value on detecting breast cancer early.

“With its new recommendations, the USPSTF is essentially telling women that mammography at age 40 to 49 saves lives; just not enough of them. The task force says screening women in their 40s would reduce their risk of death from breast cancer by 15 percent, just as it does for women in their 50s. But because women in their 40s are at lower risk of the disease than women 50 and above, the USPSTF says the actual number of lives saved is not enough to recommend widespread screening. The most recent data show us that approximately 17 percent of breast cancer deaths occurred in women who were diagnosed in their 40s, and 22 percent occurred in women diagnosed in their 50s. Breast cancer is a serious health problem facing adult women, and mammography is part of our solution beginning at age 40 for average risk women.

“The American Cancer Society acknowledges the limitations of mammography, and we remain committed to finding better tests, and currently are funding a large study to improve the accuracy of mammography. In fact, data show the technology used today is better than that used in the studies in this review, and more modern studies show that mammography is achieving better results than those achieved in these early experimental studies that go back as far as the mid-60’s. And as scientists work to make mammography even more effective, the American Cancer Society’s medical staff and volunteer experts overwhelmingly believe the benefits of screening women aged 40 to 49 outweigh its limitations.”

The American Cancer Society combines an unyielding passion with nearly a century of experience to save lives and end suffering from cancer. As a global grassroots force of more than three million volunteers, we fight for every birthday threatened by every cancer in every community. We save lives by helping people stay well by preventing cancer or detecting it early; helping people get well by being there for them during and after a cancer diagnosis; by finding cures through investment in groundbreaking discovery; and by fighting back by rallying lawmakers to pass laws to defeat cancer and by rallying communities worldwide to join the fight. As the nation's largest non-governmental investor in cancer research, contributing about $3.4 billion, we turn what we know about cancer into what we do. As a result, more than 11 million people in America who have had cancer and countless more who have avoided it will be celebrating birthdays this year. To learn more about us or to get help, call us anytime, day or night, at 1-800-227-2345 or visit cancer.org.

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