

“Ask the Doctor”: 40 not 50 Campaign:

Screening Mammograms: New guidelines:

A **government appointed task force** (USPSTF)* is now recommending that women start mammographic screening at age 50, do it every other year and **stop at age 74**. These guidelines are based on **flawed science**. I am convinced that the committee’s primary goal in making these recommendations was **cost-containment**. The issue of how these guidelines would adversely impact women’s health was essentially ignored.

The Problem: We are already seeing the **ill-effect effects** of the committee’s recommendations. Women are **confused** about conflicting guidelines, and many are content to delay screening until age 50. **Doctors** don’t have time to discuss screening options, and some have now stopped ordering mammograms for women in their 40s.

However, the most important effect of the new guidelines is that it gives **insurance companies an excuse not to pay**. Already, our patients are discovering that some insurance companies are denying payment for screening mammograms. Unless something is done to reverse this trend, insurance companies will undoubtedly expand these efforts.

The **impact on women’s health** will not be immediately apparent, but in the near future it will become clear the new guidelines are leading to diagnostic delays. More women will be diagnosed with advanced cancer requiring more aggressive treatments (chemotherapy, surgery & radiation). Breast cancer mortality rates will rise. **Young women will die needlessly** and children will grow up without their mothers.

The irony is that this is taking place at a time when incredible progress is being made in the early detection of breast cancer. We now have new technology (3-D mammograms, screening breast ultrasound and breast MRI) that gives us the **potential to reduce breast cancer mortality by more than 50%**. Thus, just when we are making great strides in breast cancer care, we on the verge of taking a major step backward.

The **key to reducing breast cancer mortality** is to start yearly mammographic screening at age 40 (earlier if high-risk: [link](#)). **Breast cancer is a disease of younger women.** More years of life are lost for women diagnosed with breast cancer in their 40s than all the years of life lost for women 50 and over ([link](#)). Additionally, the majority of lethal breast cancers occur in women who were diagnosed before the age of 50.

It is time to **fight back.** We are starting a grass roots campaign to protest against these new guidelines, and to educate women about the value of early detection. The campaign is called **40 not 50** and **we need your help.**

More details on the campaign will be described in the July issue of "Ask the Doctor", but **we need your help now.** If you would like to **get involved**, or have comments, contact us at:

Please share this issue of Ask the Doctor with your friends.

*US Preventative Services Task Force:

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