

LRA offers Digital Mammography
by Mike DeCinti

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death among women, exceeded only by lung cancer. Statistics demonstrate that one in eight women will develop breast cancer sometime in her life. The stage at which breast cancer is detected influences a woman's survival. If detected early, the five-year survival rate is 97%, and the best way to detect breast cancer at its earliest stage is with a mammogram.

These are sad realities, and unfortunately they are not often discussed until the month of October. However breast cancer is a twelve-month a year disease and it needs to be addressed by informing the public as much as possible, especially when new technology becomes available that can help more in the fight against breast cancer.

Women who undergo annual mammograms now have the latest diagnostic technology available to them, digital mammography. Lumberton Radiological Associates is the first healthcare provider in Robeson County to feature this state-of-the-art system, and beginning this month women's healthcare is about to change. Digital mammography has quickly become the standard in breast imaging, and mammography has been the best tool in early diagnosis giving patients a much better chance of survival and leading a long, productive life.

Women will notice little difference when going for a digital mammogram. The procedure is the same as traditional film mammography, but less time consuming since repeated repositioning of the breasts for additional imaging is frequently unnecessary. The radiologist can process and retrieve the images faster, and because digital mammography is "filmless," nothing has to be developed. Images are analyzed on a monitor and stored electronically. And digital mammography definitely has advantages for the patient. It's quicker, offering a woman the convenience of having her mammogram without repeated imaging and exposure to radiation. Plus, for the radiologist, digital mammograms provide more comprehensive visibility. This translates into a win-win situation for the patient.

When reading the results of a digital mammogram, the radiologist is better able to manipulate the image to see through the breast more clearly, from the skin line to the chest wall. If there are calcifications, for example, they can be enhanced or magnified, which aids in analyzing whether the calcifications are suspicious or not. Women with dense breasts can benefit from a digital mammogram as well. Many younger women and those choosing hormone replacement therapy may have dense breasts. For them, screening with digital mammography provides better visualization of the breast tissue.

In conjunction with the digital mammography unit, LRA continues to offer R2 Computer-Aided Detection. "CAD" (as it is referred) provides a "second read" of the mammogram by a computer. This assists the radiologist in making an accurate diagnosis.

Women find many reasons to put off having a mammogram, but with new digital technology, reduced examination times providing results the same day, and extraordinary experience LRA hopes to reduce their anxiety.

This new technology does mean the price of a mammogram has gone up. However, as with traditional mammograms, most insurance companies will pay for a woman to receive a yearly mammogram free of charge once a year after the age of forty. It is always best to check with your insurance company to make sure this procedure will be covered.

Unfortunately this also means that those women who do not have insurance and cannot afford a mammogram don't have it any easier. So if you would like to help those women in Robeson County who need a mammogram but can't pay for one, please consider contacting me so I can discuss with you options for you to donate to a fund that will help those women who need it the most.

And if it's time for you to receive your yearly mammogram, I encourage you to make an appointment not only for yourself, but for those that love you.

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