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The latest tool

3D mammography makes breast-screening process easier for women with dense breast tissue

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Mammograms and breast cancer screening have come a long way and experienced many advancements since becoming widely available in the 1970s.

Patient safety, discomfort, and image quality have improved. In honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, I would like to introduce you to the most recent advancement in identifying breast cancers earlier and more accurately: 3D mammography.

"3D," also known as Digital Breast Tomosynthesis (DBT), is a breakthrough technology that was approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 2011 to be used in combination with standard 2D digital mammography for breast cancer screening.

3D mammography does not replace standard mammography, but instead supplements it for screening women who have mammographically dense breast tissue. It is performed in a similar fashion to standard 2D imaging. There is no additional compression required, and it only takes a few extra seconds for each view. Very low x-ray energy is used during the exam, just like a traditional mammogram done on film.

3D mammography takes numerous images of each breast, which allows for 3D image reconstruction of the breast tissue. The radiologist is able to identify very small and/or subtle breast cancers that might otherwise be hidden by surrounding dense breast tissue on standard digital mammograms.

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3D: A clearer view through dense breast tissue

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There is less chance your doctor will call you back later for a "second look," because the breast tissue can be seen in more detail.

Both 3D and standard 2D mammograms are used for breast cancer screening to detect unsuspected breast cancer, which allows for earlier treatments and better outcomes.

Both types of mammograms are also used for diagnostic purposes, after a lump or other abnormality in the breast is found.

Breast tomosynthesis, also called 3-D mammograms, are gradually arriving in front of more patients. Sturdy Memorial Hospital is among those offering the service. (Fotolia)

Any woman 40 years or older should have a screening mammogram every year.

As for scheduling 3D, the process is the same. However, many different factors determine a patient's need for 3D vs. standard 2D.

A woman's primary care physician or the clinician who performs her clinical breast exam may recommend taking advantage of the 3D option.

If there is a family history of breast cancer or if the mammogram is being performed to follow-up certain findings seen previously, 3D is usually performed.

Additionally, at the time of the mammogram, the technologist reviews the patient's previous studies to see the breast density and asks spe-

cific questions to determine if the patient would benefit from 3D imaging.

Whether it be through 3D or standard 2D mammography, early detection is key to finding these cancers in their earliest and most treatable stages.

Sturdy Memorial Hospital's full-service Mammography Department provides patients with high-quality care in a state-of-the-art facility that is accredited by the American College of Radiology.

To learn more visit www.sturdy-memorial.org, or to make a mammography appointment, call the Imaging Department at 508-236-7770.

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