
College supports American Cancer Society screening mammography guidelines

The American College of Surgeons strongly supports the current American Cancer Society's (ACS) screening mammography guidelines that recommend women get a mammogram every year, starting at age 40. The College is supporting the ACS guidelines despite the recommendations from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force stating that women should have regular mammograms once every two years beginning at the age of 50. The College believes the ACS guidelines have resulted in an effective approach toward dealing with the possibility of breast cancer and that women should continue to follow them in consultation with their physicians.

The federal panel's position that regular mammography screening in women under the age of 50 may do more harm than good was dismissed by David P. Winchester, MD, FACS, Medical Director of the American College of Surgeons Cancer Programs, and chair of the National Accreditation Program of

Breast Centers. Dr. Winchester was particularly concerned about the panel's belief that mammography may cause an increased risk of false-positive results in younger women who have denser breast tissue, observing that "the term 'unnecessary biopsy' is misleading." "In most cases," he said, "biopsy—done by either surgeons or radiologists—is the reliable way to rule out cancer at any age."

The College notes that the ACS has long recognized mammography as the gold standard for early detection of breast cancer, and encourages women to take an active role in partnering with their physicians to determine at what age, and at what interval, they should undergo screening mammography. The College agrees with the ACS that factors such as a woman's family history of the disease, and her overall medical condition, are some of the issues that should be addressed, particularly for women who are known to be at an increased risk for developing the disease.

"Many surgeons in this country have the tremendous responsibility and privilege of caring for breast cancer patients each day. While recognizing that mammography is not perfect and supporting continuing research for improved methods, the surgical community believes that the American Cancer Society's screening mammography guidelines offer an optimal approach to detecting breast cancer early, when it can be most successfully treated," LaMar S. McGinnis, Jr., MD, FACS, President of the American College of Surgeons and former president of the American Cancer Society, said. "Mammography is a good and safe tool, which we will continue to improve. In the meantime," he added, "let's save lives as best we can. The lives of women, mothers, and grandmothers are invaluable. Our progress has been significant, and it will continue. Let us not confuse our patients and the public with mixed messages."