

## Breast Mammography and Screening Guidelines

On November 16, 2009, the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) announced a change in guidelines for mammography for women aged 40 – 49 years and recommends against teaching breast self –exam (BSE). The recommendations state, “The decision to start regular, biennial screening mammography before the age of 50 years should be an individual one and take patient context into account, including the patient’s values regarding specific benefits and harms”. The report also concluded that the current evidence is insufficient to assess the additional benefits and harm of screening mammography in women 75 years or older. Further recommendations were as follows:

- Biennial mammography for women aged 50 – 74yrs.
- Breast self-exam(BSE) should not be promoted

**Bermuda Cancer and Health Centre currently follow the guidelines of the American Cancer Society (ACS) whose members were quick to offer a strong rebuttal to these recommendations.**

“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”.

The report further states – “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”. The USPSTF says that screening 1,339 women in their 50’s to save one life makes screening worthwhile in that age group. Yet USPSTF also says screening 1,904 women ages 40 – 49 in order to save one life is not worthwhile.

The most recent data shows that 17% of breast cancer deaths occurred in women who were diagnosed in their 40’s and 22% of the deaths occurred in women in their 50’s.

The ACS acknowledges the limitations of mammography and remains committed to finding better tests. At this time however, the medical staff and volunteer experts overwhelmingly believe the benefits of screening women aged 40 to 49 years outweighs its limitations.