

Breast Cancer and Women with Disabilities

Women in the United States get breast cancer more than any other type of cancer except for skin cancer.¹ In Montana, an average of 800 women are diagnosed with breast cancer each year.² Breast cancer screening means checking a woman's breasts for cancer before there are signs or symptoms of the disease. Doctors recommend that women have regular clinical breast exams and mammograms to find breast cancer early. When abnormal tissue or cancer is found early, it may be easier to treat.¹

Breast cancer is a major public health concern for all women, including women with disabilities. In the U.S., women who have disabilities are just as likely as women without disabilities to have ever received a mammogram. However, they are significantly less likely to have been screened within the recommended guidelines.³ Barriers to screening include: thinking "it won't happen to me"; focusing on other health issues; difficulty with positioning while getting a mammogram; not knowing where to go for accessible screening; inaccessible facilities and equipment; and the provider's knowledge and attitudes.³ Providers should ensure that they are not only treating a woman's disability, but are regularly addressing screening for breast cancer and other conditions for which screening is recommended.

Tips to Increase Breast Cancer Screening Rates for Women with Disabilities

- Train scheduling staff, radiologic technologists and providers on appropriate communication and screening techniques for women with disabilities. This training can ensure that more women are screened for breast cancer within the recommended guidelines.
- When scheduling a woman with a disability for breast cancer screening, it is often useful for staff to ask questions to determine what additional assistance or time may be needed to complete the screening test.
- Become familiar with methods to assist a person with a disability during an exam, to avoid embarrassment and frustration for both the patient and the staff member.
- The provider and patient should discuss specific needs and preferences during screening, such as assistance with undressing, seated mammograms, and additional time for appointments.
- Office staff and providers can create a practice that is physically accessible and accommodating for

everyone, regardless of ability. A universally accessible practice may increase the likelihood that patients with disabilities will seek out and obtain regular preventive health care services.⁵

- Information in the document titled "Access to Medical Care for Individuals with Mobility Disabilities" can assist providers in understanding how to work with patients with disabilities, as well as determining how to make exam rooms and equipment accessible.
http://www.ada.gov/medcare_ta.htm

Montana Resources

In Montana, women can arrange to receive a mammogram from a seated position. All mammography centers in the state have at least one machine that can be lowered for someone who is sitting down (i.e., to 31 inches or lower).⁴

The Montana Disability and Health Program maintains a mammography directory, which provides information on mammography service providers by city. Each entry includes contact information, hours of operation, standard and additional services available, and disability access information.

The CDC found that one barrier to breast cancer screening for women with disabilities is the lack of health promotion messages and materials that reflect their unique needs. The CDC created health promotion materials (e.g., posters, MP3 files, low-tech fliers, print advertisements, and tip sheets) to increase awareness of breast cancer among women with physical disabilities and encourage these women to get screened. Materials share the tagline "Breast Cancer Screening. The Right To Know," and feature four women with physical disabilities who have survived breast cancer.³ Free "Right to Know" materials are available online at
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/righttoknow/>.

1 National Cancer Institute. Breast Cancer Prevention PDO® "General Information About Breast Cancer" (Patient Version) www.cancer.gov

2 Montana Central Tumor Registry Annual Report 2009

3 Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. The Right to Know Campaign (Overview) www.cdc.gov

4 Montana Disability and Health Program <http://mtdh.ruralinstitute.umd.edu/>

5 Adapted from The Center for Universal Design and The North Carolina Office on Disability and Health <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncodh/rbar/>