

Alberta Society of Radiologists  
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**RADIOLOGISTS REFUTE CANADIAN TASK FORCE ON BREAST SCREENING GUIDELINE**  
Data flawed – Impact on Alberta Women Negative

*Edmonton, AB*      *November 21, 2011*      The professional association of Radiologists for the Province of Alberta voiced apprehension about the proposed guideline for breast cancer screening issued by the Canadian Task Force on November 21, 2011. The Society believes there will be a significant, and negative, impact on the health and well being of Alberta women if this guideline is adopted.

Similar to the guideline from the United States Preventive Services Task Force from 2009, the Canadian Task Force based its conclusions on screening studies performed in the 1960's to 1980's on outmoded equipment. More recent data was not taken into consideration in crafting the guideline, and there was no recognition of the increased sensitivity of the current digital mammography technology. Incredibly there were no lay persons, radiologists, breast surgeons or oncologists on the Task Force to provide a frontline perspective on the screening issue.

The guideline diminishes the value of screening in the age 40 – 49 age group. In Alberta in 2010, information in the profession's database showed that of 1,221 breast cancers detected in screening, 212 (18%) were found in the 40 to 49 age group.

Dr. Maureen Hutson, Radiologist and Mammographer with Medical Imaging Consultants and a Clinical Associate Professor of Diagnostic Imaging at the University of Alberta said, "Radiologists are concerned that the new recommendations will confuse patients and their

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physicians, and will lead to unnecessary deaths from breast cancer in Alberta.”

Anxiety and interventions associated with findings which are later found to be benign, were noted as reasons not to perform screening. It is true that 5 to 8% of screening patients will be recalled to the clinic for additional mammographic views or ultrasound. These supplemental studies are necessary because the primary purpose of breast screening is to find early cancers. The guideline does not reflect that survival for breast cancer is much improved when tumours are caught when they are very small.

Dr. Kelly Dabbs, Clinical Professor of Surgery at the University of Alberta and Medical Lead of the Edmonton Comprehensive Breast Care Program stated, “Screening is one of the main reasons that the majority of the breast cancers seen by surgeons today are small and readily treatable. The large tumours of the 1960’s are a thing of the past because of it, allowing breast conservation and curative treatment in a high volume of patients. The “harm” of being called back for additional views is far less than the trauma of losing a breast”.

Alberta Radiologists will discuss screening mammography with their physician colleagues. The international community, Canadian Association of Radiologists and other provincial radiologist organizations have expressed their concerns with the Task Force guideline. Radiologists encourage women and their doctors to continue with their current practice of regular mammography screening.

**ABOUT ALBERTA SOCIETY OF RADIOLOGISTS (ASR)/SECTION OF DIAGNOSTIC IMAGING, ALBERTA MEDICAL ASSOCIATION** - is the professional organization for radiologist physicians and radiology residents in the Province of Alberta. It represents 90% of the radiologists who deliver diagnostic imaging in the Province.

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