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Tigerlily Foundation Statement on United States Preventive Services Task Force Study

Tigerlily Foundation provides its comments to the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) Study within this document.

On Monday, November 16, 2009, the Lombardi Cancer Center at Georgetown University released an analysis led by Jeanne S. Mandelblatt, MD, MPH (of Georgetown Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center and a CISNET member), along with six independent team of researchers, which suggests that mammography screening should be done every other year, discouraged the efficacy of performing breast self-exams or the usefulness of clinical breast exams.

The study states that a comprehensive analysis was done of various mammography screening schedules that suggest biennial screening of average risk women between the ages of 50 and 74 achieves the most benefits of annual screening but with less harm. We are aware that this study address women in a higher age group than those we directly support; however, we are concerned about the message it sends to younger women, who often have more aggressive breast cancers and higher mortality rates, because they are not aware that they can be affected by breast cancer and are sometimes diagnosed too late.

While it has been shown that mammograms are not as effective for younger women due to denser breast tissue, until a more effective tool has been provided to this population, young women should have access to and be educated about the current tools such as breast self examinations and mammography if needed. Approximately 11,000 women under 40 are diagnosed annually and nearly 1,100 lose their lives. Further, younger women are often more adversely affected by breast cancer and experience wider disparities in care, treatment, long-term health, shortened life-span, fertility, financial and related health and life issues. Therefore, they should have access to resources and tools that could result in early detection and allow for earlier treatment of breast cancer.

While breast self examinations and mammography may lead to false-positive mammograms, these incidences are of miniscule importance when compared to the loss of life that could occur when women do not have access to vital healthcare options.

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Tigerlily Foundation encourages young women to be their own best advocates. This means that they should learn the facts, know their bodies and speak up for their health. This means conducting monthly self examinations so that they become aware of their breast health and important information, be aware of changes in their breasts, and engage their doctors if there is a concern. We are concerned that the recent recommendations by the USPSTF might deter younger women from pursuing healthy options that could lower their risk of developing more aggressive breast cancer.

Younger women are not in the majority of women getting diagnosed with breast cancers, but their tumors are often faster growing, therefore closer attention needs to be paid to this demographic. We urge young women to follow the current standards of examination and detection, until a better screening method is discovered.

Tigerlily Foundation's (www.tigerlilyfoundation.org) position is that although a lot of research still needs to be done to find the most appropriate, timely screening methods for younger women, we cannot eliminate the current, life-saving tools that we currently use. The Mandelblatt study, while it takes into account the average across the community, is not written with a focus on younger women, who have more aggressive types of breast cancers, and therefore, who greatly benefit from monthly self examinations, annual clinical examinations and then mammograms, based on their age, personal and family risk factors.

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