

Exciting advances in breast imaging

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month for some. For those who work to find and treat breast cancer, every day of every month is about breast cancer awareness. In 2014 there have been many new and exciting advancements to be aware of.

On January 2014, North Carolina became the 12th state in the nation to enact a “breast density notification” law. The law states that every mammogram patient must be notified in her result letter whether her breast tissue is “dense.” Normal breast glandular tissue is white on a mammogram. Unfortunately, cancerous tissue is also white. While most (80 percent) breast cancers are found by mammograms, some (20 percent) are “hidden” by the normal breast tissue and cannot be found. This happens most in younger women whose tissue is usually more dense. In women with the most dense tissue, mammograms may only find half of the cancers. In older women whose tissue tends to be less dense

and more fatty, almost all breast cancers are found. In addition, there is scientific evidence that dense breast tissue is also a risk factor that can lead to a greater chance of getting breast cancer. This is a “perfect storm” where dense tissue increases a woman’s risk of getting breast cancer while lowering the chances of finding it.

But there is some good news too. Research has shown that performing screening breast ultrasound in addition to routine mammography can double breast cancer detection in dense breasted women. This is a low cost test that uses no radiation or compression and can be done at the time of a mammogram.

The most exciting advance in breast cancer detection is 3D mammography, more formally known as Tomosynthesis. This test is done on a modified mammography machine but instead of just taking 2 pictures it takes multiple low-dose images that are used to create “slices” much like a CT scan. These “slices” eliminate the

overlap of normal dense tissue and abnormal tissue and make it easier to find abnormalities. It also eliminates the overlap of normal tissues that can lead to the all-too-common false alarms that result in being called back for additional views that are usually normal. The data show that false alarms are reduced by almost 50 percent and cancer detection is increased from 30-50 percent.

Despite all of the exciting advances in technology that promise to improve breast cancer detection while reducing the limitations (false alarms, unnecessary biopsies) of mammography, even the best technology requires that it be in hands of the most skilled doctors. In this country, most breast imaging exams are done by “general” radiologists who perform the full spectrum of imaging including chest X-rays, CT scan, MRIs, etc. of all parts of the body. It is well established that specialists who have received specialized training (known as “Fellowship training”) are able to find more breast can-

cer with less false-alarms and unnecessary biopsies. When choosing where you have your breast imaging performed, it is important to make sure your exam will be interpreted by a Fellowship trained expert.

— *Dr. Schroeder is the medical director of Carolina Breast Imaging Specialists in Greenville. Formerly of Eastern Radiologists, Dr. Schroeder has been the leading fellowship trained breast imaging radiologist in eastern North Carolina since 1996. Carolina Breast Imaging Specialists, celebrating its 1 year anniversary on November 4th, is the only breast imaging practice in the region where all physicians are fellowship trained breast imaging experts, and the staff, including Jana Gurganus, Melanie Wallace and Melissa Shepard, are the most seasoned anywhere with nearly 60 years combined experience. Carolina Breast Imaging Specialists is located at 990 Johns Hopkins Drive in Greenville NC. For more information or to schedule an appointment call their office at 252-565-8951 or visit www.CBISpecialists.com.*