

Column - Mammograms key to early detection of breast cancer

By Dr. Anfissa Sokolova for the Union-Bulletin

- As of Friday, October 16, 2015

Do the words mammogram and spa day go together? They do if you live in Walla Walla.

Mammograms can be uncomfortable for many women. That's why for Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Adventist Health/Walla Walla General Hospital is offering "Mammography Spa Days" Oct. 18-21 from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Call 509-527-8273 to schedule an appointment.

It's part of an ongoing effort to encourage more women to get screened, while offering a more comfortable mammography experience.

In Washington state, an estimated 5,480 new cases of breast cancer will be reported in 2015. Ninety-nine percent of all cases in the U.S. occur in women, putting mothers, daughters, sisters best friends and other loved ones at risk.

Women should talk with their OB/Gyn or primary care provider about scheduling a mammogram, an X-ray that allows doctors to examine breast tissue for any irregularities, specifically breast cancer.

Starting in their 40s, women should have a mammogram annually. If an immediate family member — mother, sister or daughter — has had breast cancer, screenings before turning 40 are recommended.

While eight out of 10 lumps are benign, an doctor appointment should be scheduled as soon as possible if you find an unexplainable lump or knot, or if you notice any concerning changes in your breast tissue. Getting screened is essential. The earlier that cancer is detected, chances for successful treatment and survival increase significantly.

"I can't stress enough the importance of getting screened for even the smallest lump or change in breast tissue, as it could save your life," says Dr. Ken Snider, an OB/Gyn at Adventist Health Medical Group.

He recommends that all adult women perform a monthly breast self-exam, checking for lumps or any changes in how their breasts look or feel.

According to a study by Johns Hopkins Hospital, 40 percent of breast cancer cases are detected through a lump or knot discovered during a self-exam.

It's extremely rare, but men, too, can get breast cancer. In 2015, nearly 2,400 men in the U.S. will be diagnosed with breast cancer.

"While men don't typically get breast cancer, it still happens," Snider said. "Anyone experiencing symptoms should schedule an appointment with their doctor to address any concerns or irregularities, including men."

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