

Script – Print - What OB/GYNs Want You to Know About Mammograms

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month

If you've visited your OB-GYN lately, you probably experienced a battery of preventive care services, including pap smears, pelvic exams and blood work. But your physician might have also mentioned something about scheduling your annual mammogram.

The timing couldn't be better. October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month and OBGYNs are stressing to their patients the importance of screening as well as communicating with their doctor, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Cancer screening, of which mammography is a type for breast cancer, is still really important especially in this day in age of COVID-19 because cancers are still occurring at the same rates as before, and we did see a decrease in the amount of well women visits and routine cancer screenings when COVID first hit," said Dr. Christina Kramer, OB/GYN, OSF HealthCare.

According to the American Cancer Society, there are two types of mammograms. A screening mammogram is used to look for signs of breast cancer in women who don't have any breast symptoms or problems. A screening includes taking x-rays of each breast, usually from two different angles.

A diagnostic mammogram is used if a woman has experienced symptoms, or if a change is detected on a screening mammogram. A diagnostic mammogram may include additional images of the breast and are sometimes used to screen women who have a history of breast cancer.

Thanks to advancements made in technology, including the invention of FDA-approved digital mammography, 80 to 90 percent of breast cancers in women are detected without symptoms.

"So mammography is recommended every 1-2 years for women over the age of 50 and sometimes every 1-2 years starting at age 40 depending on a patient's preferences and personal and family risk factors," said Dr. Christina Kramer, OB/GYN, OSF HealthCare. "We see a large population of women who should be coming in for care for breast cancer screening even in these times."

When Dr. Kramer meets with patients, she discusses a number of health maintenance issues during the routine visit, including the need for mammography, when screenings should start and determining whether it's an annual appointment or every two years.

"That takes into consideration the patient's preferences, perhaps her fear of acquiring cancer, some obstetrical risks based on how many children she's had, if she's breast fed or not, as well as other family risks, if other family members have had breast cancer or some other female cancers such as ovarian cancer," said Dr. Christina Kramer, OB/GYN, OSF HealthCare.

For patients who have yet to experience a mammogram, Dr. Kramer carefully explains the process, answers any questions, and informs the patient on what she can expect during the procedure, which usually lasts about 20 – 30 minutes. Education, she said, is the key.

“The most common one is the anxiety over discomfort,” said Dr. Christina Kramer, OB/GYN, OSF HealthCare. “I think setting them up for what a visit is going to be like in the mammography suite, also letting them know what mammography technicians they are going to encounter. Knowing they are women and they have individual names really seems to help, knowing it’s a personal encounter rather than an encounter with a machine really seems to help a lot of patients.”

For more information about mammograms and breast health, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).