

High-Tech, *High-Touch*

EARLY DETECTION HELPS TO PREVENT, TREAT BREAST CANCER

In medicine, it's called the "continuum of care." The term refers to a standard of continuous monitoring of a patient's health over his or her lifetime and is a major factor in early breast cancer detection.

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For Terry Mason, RT, mammography supervisor of the Radiology Department at Halifax Regional Medical Center, and her staff, care is the watchword for every patient, every day.

“We want and try to give every patient the special feeling that we understand, that we are with you in this and really do care about you,” Mason says. “We cry and laugh with our patients, and hug and pray for them. We are truly neighbors taking care of neighbors.”

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths among women in the United States, and rates tend to be higher in the counties of Halifax and Northampton compared to the North Carolina average. While

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October is designated National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Halifax Regional is dedicated to breast cancer detection and treatment year-round.

THE TECHNOLOGY OF COMPASSION

Cutting-edge medicine plays a major role in early diagnosis at Halifax Regional, which is committed to acquiring new technologies that benefit patients,

says Bill Navarro, BBA, RT, director of the Radiology Department.

“The last five years really demonstrate that commitment,” he says. “We’ve purchased fully digital mammography equipment with computer-aided detection (CAD) software, brought in a digital ultrasound machine with software that can help distinguish between tumors and fluid-filled masses, and moved to performing sentinel node biopsies. That’s a track record of being on the edge of technology, ensuring we provide the best care possible.”

CAD software gives radiologists a second look at breast imaging and alerts them to areas that may be of concern. Sentinel node biopsies may eliminate the need to remove all lymph nodes under the arm to check for cancer spread.

Beyond the technology, Halifax Regional mammographers and X-ray technologists continue the close relationships that characterize the Mammography Center’s commitment to personal care. “You have to be a special person to work in mammography, because you really get attached to and care about your patients,” Navarro says. “You know the patients you see are the same people you’re going to see at the grocery store and your kids’ baseball games.”



The Supersonic Aixplorer system offers advanced ultrasound imaging.

The Mammography Center is accredited by the American College of Radiology, the Food and Drug Administration and the state of North Carolina. Meeting the strenuous requirements of these agencies means equipment is tested year-round, diagnostic results and policies are frequently audited, and education for all staff members is ongoing.

BREAKING BARRIERS

Mason and her staff are concerned for local women who do not undergo mammograms or follow up on them for financial reasons. While Medicare, Medicaid and many insurance companies pay for the mammogram itself, patients sometimes lack the funds for high insurance premiums, deductibles or needed follow-up. Halifax Regional is addressing this problem through grants from the Susan G. Komen North Carolina Triangle to the Coast Affiliate and donations from local groups, aimed at covering both mammograms and any necessary follow-up.

With the strong resources available in Halifax and Northampton counties, there is no reason for any woman to miss out on this critical health protection.

Two-time breast cancer survivor Judith Barrett, whose cancers were caught early by mammography, affirms this idea: “I think we have an absolutely fantastic mammography and cancer treatment center here in Roanoke Rapids. Friends who have gone out of town for treatment have been told by their doctors there, ‘You do know you can get the same benefit in your own community and not have to travel.’”

START EARLY

Early detection really is your best protection against breast cancer. Call Halifax Regional Mammography at **252-535-3417** to learn more.

