

## **Changes to mammography screening in Ontario**

A recent independent study conducted by Cancer Care Ontario (CCO) examining the technology used for mammography found that digital direct radiography (DR) and screen film are significantly more effective than digital computed radiography (CR) at detecting breast cancer.

CCO is an evidence-based organization, committed to continuous quality improvement, and has recommended to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) to transition all mammography with CR technology to DR technology in order to maintain its commitment to continuous quality improvement to cancer screening in Ontario. In response to this recommendation, the MOHLTC is investing to transition all mammography with CR technology to DR technology.

### **About mammogram screening technology**

Mammography is the primary test used to screen for breast cancer. Traditionally, women were screened with screen film mammography, in which an image was captured on, and viewed on a film. With advances in technology, digital mammography was developed, where images of the breast were no longer viewed on film, but were viewed and assessed on a computer screen.

There are two types of digital mammography systems referred to as DR and CR.

- DR – the image is captured and is immediately electronically processed as a digital image.
- CR – the image is captured within a cassette on an image plate and processed as a digital image. An external reading device is needed to generate the digital image.

Mammography with CR technology is used nationally and internationally, and currently accounts for 24 percent of all mammography machines in the province of Ontario.

### **Information for women**

- Mammography remains the most effective way to detect breast cancer in average risk women.
- Women should contact the clinic where they were last screened to find out what type of mammography technology they were last screened with and their choices regarding their next screening. A list of all clinics that offer breast mammography is available at [www.cancercare.on.ca/mammogram](http://www.cancercare.on.ca/mammogram). Women can also contact Cancer Care Ontario at 1-800-668-9304 Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. for more information.

Women have several options available to them:

- Wait to be rescreened until when their local clinic have replaced CR technology with DR technology.
- You can book an appointment to be rescreened now at a clinic near you using DR or screen film technology.
- Proceed with your next breast screening appointment as scheduled. (If your clinic continues to offer CR screening.)

The chance of having an undiagnosed cancer in women who have been screened with mammography using CR is extremely low.

### **About the effectiveness of screening mammograms**

Screening finds breast cancer earlier, when there are more treatment options and an improved chance of survival. Breast cancer death rates for Ontario women have decreased by 37 percent between 1990 and 2008 for women 50 to 74 years of age. This reduction may be the result of better treatments and increased screening with mammography.

Mammograms are the best way to find breast cancer early. But, they are not perfect.

- They may miss some cancers. Also, some cancers develop in the interval between screens. However, many studies have shown that regular mammograms reduce the risk of dying from breast cancer.
- Some cancers that appear on a mammogram may never progress to the point where a woman has symptoms during her lifetime. Therefore, some women may have surgery or treatment for a breast cancer that would never have been life threatening.
- Not all cancers found at screening can be cured. However, in Ontario most women (88 percent) are alive and well five years after the diagnosis of breast cancer.