

Mammography Screening Is Being Abolished in Switzerland

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The Swiss Medical Board reviewed all of the available evidence and released a report in February of 2014 stating the evidence does not support a common medical mantra that mammograms are safe and capable of saving lives.

It appears that mammography may prevent only one (1) death for every 1000 women screened while causing harm to many more. In their review the Board advised the quality of mammography screening should be evaluated and women should be informed in a 'balanced' way, about the benefits and harms of screening.

The Swiss Medical Board recommended no more systemic mammograms based on several important factors that were reviewed.

Statistics that are being cited in favour of mammography are based on outdated clinical trials. The first mammography trial began more than 50 years ago and the last trial was conducted in 1991. The benefits that were found during these trials were from another era of breast cancer treatment. Yet in the past two decades the treatment has been significantly improved in terms of breast cancer mortality. Thus the modest benefit of mammography screening that was shown in old trials most likely will not occur if the same trial was conducted today.

The most recent study published in the British Medical Journal involved 90,000 women followed for 25 years, found that mammograms had absolutely no impact on breast cancer mortality. In addition, this study found that 22% of cancers were over-diagnosed, leading to unnecessary treatment with surgical interventions, chemotherapy and radiation.

The Swiss Medical Board experts also noted a very significant discrepancy between women's perceptions of mammography benefits and actual reality. Whereas women had a perception that mammography prevented 80 deaths per 1000 women screened. The actual figures show that only 1 (one) breast cancer death per 10,000 women can be averted.

It is improbable that women can make an informed decision based on such an overestimation of the benefits of mammography. The great majority of women and sadly even medical professionals are unaware of the fact that the science backing the mass screening of mammography is not there to support it. Unfortunately the message of the Pink Ribbon Industry perpetuates the message that skipping annual mammogram is dangerous and irresponsible.

The truth be told, that there is more and more research and evidence that shows that more women are being harmed by regular mammograms than are saved by them. It is therefore questionable who's irresponsible; women who base their decisions on latest research and evidence and therefore avoid mammography or the Pink Ribbon Industry that continues to lobby and promote mass screening with mammography based on outdated facts and dogma.

The evidence of harm and the lack of benefit led the Swiss Medical Board to recommend abolishing mammography as a mass-screening program. This is the first step at making an objective evaluation not influenced by politics and industry's propaganda. One can only hope that other countries and policy decision makers will take this message seriously.

There are many options available to women when it comes to breast cancer screening, such as Ultrasound, MRI and Breast Thermography. Each of these methods have their strengths and weaknesses and the choice needs to be made available to all women. However, the most important choice that women can make is to focus their attention on prevention of breast cancer rather than early detection.

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