

Study examines accuracy of digital compared to film mammography

November 3 2011, By Jennifer Nachbur

Over the past few years, newer digital mammography has been replacing older film mammography, but researchers wondered, is the newer technology better at detecting cancer? A new study reported October 18, 2011 in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* and coauthored by Berta Geller, Ed.D., professor of family medicine at the University of Vermont College of Medicine, is the first to assess the accuracy of digital compared to film mammography in U.S. community practice.

Geller is principal investigator of the Vermont [Breast Cancer Surveillance System](#), which is part of the [National Cancer Institute's](#) Breast Cancer Surveillance Consortium (BCSC) – an NCI-funded collaborative network of seven mammography registries with linkages to tumor and/or pathology registries. For this study, she and colleagues examined data that were pooled from four mammography registries – including Vermont's – that participate in the BCSC and collect data from at least one facility that performs digital mammography.

The team examined bilateral digital and and filmscreen mammography examinations performed between January 1, 2000 and December 31, 2006 among women aged 40 to 79 years who did not have a history of breast cancer or breast implants. A total of 869,286 screening mammography examinations (231,034 digital and 638,252 film-screen) were performed among the 329,260 women aged 40 to 79 years. The authors note that breast cancer was diagnosed in 4,046 women (1,054 digital and 2,992 film-screen examinations), primarily at nonacademic facilities (83 percent).

The researchers found that both types of mammograms – digital and film – performed similarly for women age 50 to 79 for detecting cancer. But for women in their 40s who have not gone through menopause and who have dense breasts, [digital mammography](#) may be better than film mammography at detecting cancer. However, the researchers found that in women age 40 to 49, the risk of false positives was somewhat higher with digital than with film mammography.

Provided by University of Vermont

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