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Contact:

RMI
Randy Hicks, MD
rhicks@rmipc.net
(810) 732-5541

Rob McColgan
mccolgan@rmipc.net
(810) 732-1919

Mid Michigan Breast Center Encourages Screening Mammograms Through a Women-Friendly Approach

Comprehensive Efforts Include Design of Inviting Facilities, Caring Service, Public Outreach Campaign



FLINT, MI (January 22, 2010)—In spite of recent controversy about mammography following the November 2009 release of new recommendations from a federal government task force, the consensus of opinion in the medical community still appears to strongly support annual screening mammograms for women aged 40 and over.

Among the respected medical organizations continuing to recommend breast cancer screenings for women in their 40s are the American Cancer Society, the National Cancer Institute, the American Medical Association, and the American College of Radiology.

But well before the controversy, physicians at Regional Medical Imaging (RMI), a leading Women’s Imaging provider headquartered in Flint and serving Mid Michigan, became concerned that too many women over 40, as well as younger women at higher risk for breast cancer, were not making make annual mammograms part of their healthcare routine.

“With everything we can now do with medical technology, the prognosis can be quite good when breast cancer is detected early,” said Miriam D. Pellerito, M.D., of RMI. For more than 20 years, RMI has maintained a strong commitment to leadership in providing state-of-the-art breast cancer detection and women’s imaging services in the Mid-Michigan market.

“But if women delay starting mammograms or don’t consistently have them each year,” said Dr. Pellerito, “they substantially increase their risk of finding cancer at a later stage, when it’s much more difficult to treat.”

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So RMI launched an effort to encourage more women to focus on maintaining annual mammograms. It began with research to identify factors that cause women to lose focus on their health and allow their attention to crucial preventive medicine to lapse.

“We found that lifestyle factors were at the forefront among reasons why many women fall behind,” said Randy Hicks, M.D, of RMI. “Too often, women focus singularly on caring for others at the expense of their own health. But pure and simple procrastination also plays a role. Some women dread mammography as a cold, clinical experience that they would just as soon put off.”

The medical literature also points to behavioral influences on whether women have mammograms. An article in *Managed Care* (April 2009) by S.R. Parkington and colleagues cites unpleasant past experiences with mammography among several barriers to compliance. T.S. Tang and colleagues, in *Psychooncology* (July 2009), focus on the effects of women’s physical, psychological, and clinical service experiences during mammography visits. And J.M. Gierisch and colleagues, in *Cancer Epidemiology* (May 2009), discuss the impact of busy lifestyles and forgetting to make appointments.



To counter these lifestyle and psychological factors, RMI has worked over the past 18 months to make the mammography experience more patient friendly. The effort was comprehensive. Components included a redesign of RMI’s women’s imaging facilities to make them more comfortable, pleasant, and spa-like; staff training programs to ensure that interactions with patients are positive; and a marketing campaign to publicize RMI’s “Different Mammogram Experience” to women.

Ultimately, RMI worked to create a positive connection or impression during each interaction with a patient, whether through marketing efforts, on the telephone, through the RMI Web site, or in person.

The interior design of RMI’s facilities, in consultation with Joe Paul Bingham of Joe Paul Designs in Grand Blanc, has been important to making the concept of a women-friendly medical imaging environment a reality.

“Let’s face it: clinical settings tend to feel impersonal, cold, and intimidating--and sometimes they’re even physically uncomfortable,” said Dr. Hicks. “Since research suggests that unpleasant experiences affect how well patients keep up with preventive care, we wanted to make a marked departure from the usual expectation, with warm, comfortable, and inviting facilities.”



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The design process undertaken to accomplish this goal encompassed the choice of interior colors; selecting comfortable furniture with a more home-like appearance; and adding accessories like fountains and artwork to create a soothing atmosphere and reduce patient anxiety.

“We want patients to have a comfort level as close as possible to the way they feel in their own living rooms,” said Dr. Hicks. “There’s no good reason why a routine medical visit can’t be something that you can in some ways enjoy and look forward to.”

Among other aspects of RMI’s effort to create a more patient-friendly experience are spa-like amenities in waiting areas, such as coffee and tea service, and conveniences like free Wi-Fi.

But Dr. Hicks added that RMI’s people are the most important, make-or-break factor in the patient experience.

“We developed a training process to create a culture in which everyone in our organization, including our radiologists, technicians, and support staff, has a singular focus on exceeding patient expectations with attentive, warm, friendly, and personalized service. We want our patients to feel that we’re caring for them as we would members of our own families.

An outreach campaign introduced RMI’s “Different Mammogram Experience” last year, using a mix of print, outdoor, and broadcast advertising to position RMI as a “New Breast Friend” for area women. One strategic goal of the campaign was to encourage women to communicate positively with others in their sphere of social influence about their mammography experiences.

“We want patients to know that they can receive women-friendly care from an imaging partner that truly understands their needs and has their best interests at heart,” said Dr. Pellerito. “And we hope they’ll spread the word about that. One of the lines in our outreach campaign said that RMI’s mammography experience ‘will have you talking.’ That’s our goal—for women to notice the difference and encourage others to take action and become more proactive about preventive health care.”

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About RMI

RMI began in 1985 as a private, outpatient-based imaging facility with a goal of offering patients an alternative to hospitals for radiology services. Today RMI continues its commitment of providing state-of-the-art equipment in a patient-friendly atmosphere at its offices in Flint, Fenton, Grand Blanc and Davison. For more information, visit www.rmipc.net.

To arrange interview, photo, or video opportunities, please contact William C. Hayward, Communications, at 717-852-7171 or bhayward@marketingworks.net.

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