

Synovate Healthcare Survey:

Contributed by Synovate
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Majority of women over 40 aware of new mammogram recommendations but disagree with them; unlikely to pay out of pocket for screenings

According to a new research study by the healthcare division of global market research firm Synovate, more than eight in ten women over age 40 are aware of the US government's mammogram recommendations but six in ten disagree with them.

Synovate Healthcare conducted the study in December 2009 with a nationally representative sample of 290 women in the US aged 40-75 years old to understand awareness and perceptions of the new guidelines for mammograms released last month by the US Preventative Services Task Force.

The new guidelines recommend that women begin receiving mammograms at age 50 and repeat them every two years, instead of annual mammograms beginning at age 40 as the American Cancer Society has advocated for many years.

Synovate's study showed that awareness of the new mammogram guidelines is quite high (82%), with awareness even higher among older and more affluent women. Almost all the women surveyed (93%) could easily recall the new age and frequency recommendations.

"The fact that the majority of women are aware of the new guidelines demonstrates the high level of interest breast cancer generates. I don't think the announcement of new guidelines on hypertension or lipid lowering would generate the same levels of awareness even though mortality rates for cardiovascular disease are actually much higher than cancer," said Subhra Ghosh, Senior Vice President of Synovate Healthcare.

The study also showed that seven in ten women surveyed are concerned about breast cancer (27% are extremely or very concerned and 44% are somewhat concerned), and the vast majority (85%) had mammograms starting at about age 41.

Two in three of the respondents say they do regular breast self exams, with this being higher among women concerned about breast cancer (77%).

The majority of women surveyed (58%) disagree with the new guidelines, 22% agree and 20% are neutral.

Not surprisingly, women who agree with the new guidelines are also less concerned about developing breast cancer.

Synovate also asked the women surveyed to rate some statements related to the new guidelines and healthcare reforms in general using a five-point scale - agree strongly to disagree strongly. Respondents had strong opinions, with the following statements rating highest on 'strongly agree':

- Insurance companies should cover the cost of mammograms for women at risk every year (82% strongly agree)
- Because of the new guidelines many more will be diagnosed later (49%)
- I am skeptical about the new government guidelines regarding health (45%)
- Medical guidelines are always changing (32%)
- The new guidelines are directly related to healthcare reform and not a result of medical data (32%)

"With six in ten women disagreeing with the new guidelines, coupled with some negative perceptions of the healthcare system in general, there is some worry about women being diagnosed later as well as some suspicion around healthcare reform and government involvement in general," said Ghosh.

"We also asked women about the positives of the guidelines, such as the reduction in unnecessary procedures. They were not as aware of this so it seems the rationale for the new mammogram guidelines have either not been well conveyed to the public or is not understood by them."

However, when respondents were asked which actions they would take if annual mammograms were no longer covered by health insurance, only 38% would pay for them out of pocket (52% among those extremely/very concerned with breast cancer).

Thirty-five percent said they would not receive mammograms as often while 30% would not receive mammograms annually.

"It's possible that some women may think that they are at risk for breast cancer even if that may not be the case. For those who think their risk is lower, such as no family history, they are less likely to pay out of pocket for mammograms," said Ghosh.

About the survey

This Synovate survey was conducted online in December 2009 with a nationally representative sample of 290 women in the US aged 40-75 years old (120 aged 40-49 and 170 aged 50-75) via eNation, a service of Synovate's Omnibus group.

About Synovate

Synovate, the market research arm of Aegis Group plc, generates consumer insights that drive competitive marketing solutions. The network provides clients with cohesive global support and a comprehensive suite of research solutions. Synovate employs over 6,400 staff across 62 countries.

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