Women with Disabilities: Promoting Patient-Centered Care in Mammography Screening

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Though breast cancer is known to be a common cancer in women screening for breast cancer is not universal. The use of screening mammography has been shown to reduce mortality rates in breast cancer significantly, as it allows detection of breast cancer at an earlier stage. Unfortunately, rates for cancer screenings, including mammography, have consistently shown to be reduced in women with disabilities. These reduced rates likely have a negative impact on life expectancy. Studies evaluating rates for these cancer prevention-screening methods in Women with Disabilities (WWD) have consistently shown lower rates compared to those without disabilities. Decreased rates of screening may be related to a variety of barriers including the availability of accessible facilities, insurance status, cognitive status, patient determination, and patient knowledge regarding appropriate care.

A recent study evaluated factors beyond disability status that may be contributing to screening rates looked at the interaction of demographic and socioeconomic factors with disability using Medicare expenditure panel annual survey data from 2002 – 2008. Factors such as age, economic status, insurance status, and education were analyzed. In this study, the magnitude of disparity in screening was greater for women with complex limitations.

It is possible that the health care disparities described above for such screening services may be even greater in women with cerebral palsy compared to other groups of WWD due to any number of factors. Issues unique to CP such as less life experience with breast screening compared to acquired adult disabilities may also play a part in reduced screening. In addition individuals with cerebral palsy often have multiple impairments involving communication such as reduced hearing, impaired vision, or severe dysarthria. These communication barriers are more often found in this population compared to other causes of disabilities such as spinal cord injury, multiple sclerosis or arthritis. Even when screened and cancers discovered women with cerebral palsy have been found to have a mortality rate from breast cancer that is three times the general population. This presentations will review what is known on screening disparity and review the recommendations for breast health screening as well as what is known about the screening specifically woman with cerebral palsy.

Recommended Reproductive Health Resources by and for Women with Disabilities.

The recommended practices and research cited here on reproductive health and mammography for women with disabilities has been conducted and shaped by women researchers and health professionals who happen to live with disabilities themselves.

In order to ensure disability competent clinical care and health services, it is essential that the voices and experiences of women living with Cerebral Palsy or physical disabilities are included in an authoritative consultative role when shaping the delivery of
all health services that are designed to serve them. Toward this end we recommend the following resources that have been shaped by and for women with disabilities:

- **U.S. CDC Right to Know Campaign Resources:** In 2008 US CDC partnered with women with disabilities to create free CDC brochures, fact sheets, and other educational materials for providers and patients to promote breast screening for women with disabilities. Several of the key women featured in this campaign live with Cerebral Palsy:

- **Illinois Department Public Health Webinar:** “Creating Accessible Mamography Services for Women with Disabilities”: In 2014 IDPH partnered with women with disabilities and mamography providers to develop and offer a training webinar on providing accessible mamography services:
  [http://www.adaconferences.org/Health/Archives/](http://www.adaconferences.org/Health/Archives/)

- **DREDF Healthcare Accesss Stories Videos:** In 2011 DREDF (Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund) compiled a series of video excerpts that feature stories about inaccessible examination tables and weight scales and healthcare provider misperceptions and stereotypes of people with Cerebral Palsy who have speech and other limitations. These downloadable videos specify barriers to care for both men and women living with Cerebral Palsy and other disabilities as well as recommendations for improving care.

- **Access Living’s Take Charge: A Reproductive Health Guide by and for Women with Disabilities:** In 2015 the Empowered FeFes a community organizing group of women and girls with disabilities that included women with Cerebral Palsy published this guide which includes discussions on mamography, contraception, mothering, domestic violence, gynecological exams and much more. It also includes a chart specifying healthcare ADA accommodations for women with various disabilities in the healthcare setting. This 50 page booklet is available in both pdf and soft cover. For copies please email [jreis@accessliving.org](mailto:jreis@accessliving.org) or contact Fulani Thrasher 312-640-2190 [fthrasher@accessliving.org](mailto:fthrasher@accessliving.org).
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