

# Susan G. Komen for the Cure® Advocacy Alliance Warns of Increased Risk and Flaws of Mammography for Women with Dense Breasts

## *Leading Breast Cancer Activists Call for Increased Education; Access to Screening*

WASHINGTON, D.C. (October 18, 2010) – A third of women over 40 are at greater risk of developing breast cancer and they may not even know it, warned the Susan G. Komen for the Cure® Advocacy Alliance. Women with dense breasts – breasts that have more breast tissue than fat – are four to five times more likely to develop breast cancer, yet according to a recent Harris survey 95 percent of women over 40 have no idea about their breast density and less than 10 percent of doctors are talking to their patients about their breast density and what it means for their breast cancer risk.

“Most women don’t have any idea how dense their breasts are, what it means for their risk of developing breast cancer, or that their breast density may actually be hiding tumors from detection,” said Nancy G. Brinker, founder and CEO of Susan G. Komen for the Cure and interim president of the Komen Advocacy Alliance. “It needs to be regular practice for doctors to inform women about their breast density and relative risk.”

In addition to being a risk factor for developing breast cancer, higher density can make the cancers more difficult to detect with traditional mammography. This is because tissue and tumors both show up as white on a mammogram, and when you have a lot of dense breast tissue, an abnormality can be hard to spot, even to trained eyes.

Due to the limitations of traditional mammography, Komen urges doctors to discuss with their patients with dense breasts what screening tools might be appropriate for them. If they agree to additional screening, such as digital mammography, an ultrasound, **magnetic resonance imaging** (MRI) or some other tool as the technology develops, insurance companies should cover it, which is not always the case right now.

“Women need to be empowered to make informed choices about their breast health,” said Brinker. “Yet knowledge is only power if you have the ability to do something with it. That’s why it’s important that insurance cover additional screenings as appropriate, and that we continue to develop more effective technologies.”

Komen notes that more specific and sensitive early detection tools are needed. For their part, Komen has invested more than \$40 million in early detection research on projects that are focusing on innovation, such as developing new imaging technologies that provide enhanced, three-dimensional images and are more comfortable; exploring whether genetic codes (biomarkers) in tissue or fluid can be used to create screening

tests; identifying ways to detect aggressive subtypes, such as inflammatory breast cancer and triple negative breast cancer; and understanding how breast density impacts the effectiveness of different screening technologies.

Komen believes increasing the variety of screening technologies available to women is critical to a woman's right to access the screening tools that may save her life. For more information on breast cancer rights Komen is working to ensure and protect, read Komen's [Breast Cancer Bill of Rights](#). For more information on breast density, visit [www.komen.org](http://www.komen.org)