

Why Women are Late for their  
Annual Mammograms: Patient  
Reported Barriers to Obtaining  
Yearly Screening Mammograms  
and Opportunities for  
Improvement

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# Purpose:

Screening mammograms are vital in the early detection and treatment of breast cancer. Despite this, not all women undergo yearly screening. We aim to identify barriers to women returning for their annual exam with a goal of being able to address these issues in our practice and improve adherence to screening.

# Methods:

The study was IRB approved and HIPAA compliant. The electronic medical record was used to identify patients  $\geq 40$  years of age who had not returned to our institution for their routine screening mammogram within 16 months of their last exam from January 2015 to December 2018. Women with a personal history of breast cancer were excluded from this group. A multiple-choice survey consisting of 4 demographic identifiers and 6 questions was then emailed to these patients; the survey was not resent if the patient did not respond. Demographics included ethnicity, age group, proximity to our imaging center, and insurer. Survey questions were designed to elicit patients' knowledge of recommended initiation and frequency of screening mammograms and barriers to obtaining mammograms. We also wanted to learn what providers are recommending based on which accreditation to follow.

### Survey Questions

1. At what age should women begin having a screening mammogram?
  - a. 35
  - b. 40
  - c. 50
  - d. I don't know
  - e. Screening not indicated
  
2. To your understanding, how often should you receive a screening mammogram?
  - a. Every 1 year
  - b. Every 2 years
  - c. Every 3 years
  - d. I don't know
  - e. Screening not indicated
  
3. Do you receive a reminder when you are due for your mammogram?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
4. Choose the main reason why you are late in completing your mammogram? Choose up to three.
  - a. I don't have a family history of breast cancer
  - b. I don't have any symptoms
  - c. I do not have insurance
  - d. I can't take time off work
  - e. I was not aware I was due
  - f. Mammograms cause me anxiety
  - g. Mammograms are painful
  - h. My last mammogram was a negative experience
  
5. How did you feel after your last mammogram? Choose up to three.
  - a. Relieved
  - b. Sad/Emotional
  - c. Accomplished
  - d. Anxious
  - e. Worried
  - f. Fine
  - g. Other
  
6. What type of Primary Care Physician do you have?
  - a. Internist
  - b. Family Practitioner
  - c. OB Gyn
  - d. Other

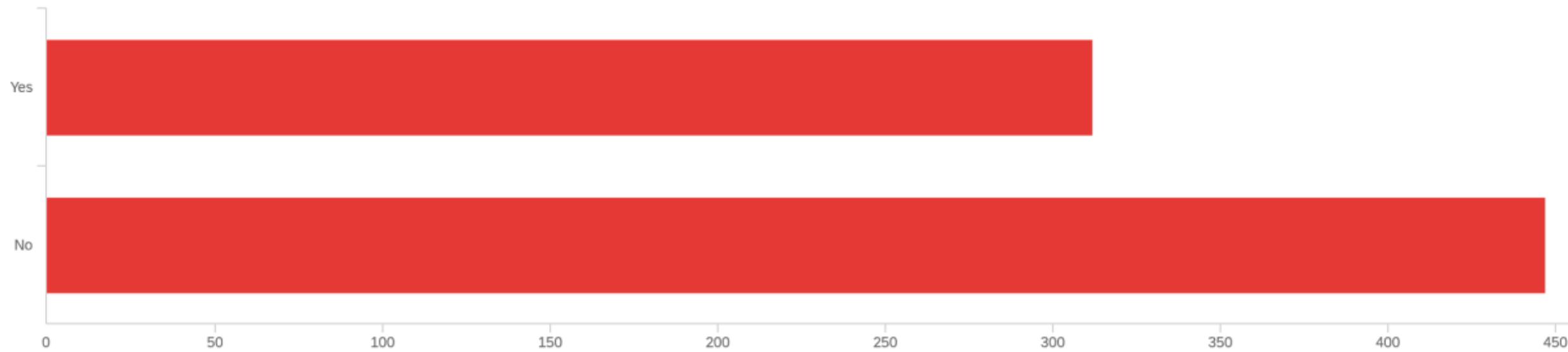
# Results:

Invitation for survey completion was sent to 3477 patients. The 860 (25%) patients which stated they were in fact still receiving yearly mammograms but at a facility outside our institution were not further prompted to fill out the survey questions. Out of the remaining 2617 patients, 806 returned a completed survey for a 31% response rate. Most of our patients were Caucasian (94%). The highest percent of patients were 50-59 yo (25%). Seventy-four percent of patients lived less than 29 miles from our imaging center. Insurer types included 61% private, 4% Medicaid, 32% Medicare, and 3% self-pay.

# Results:

Related to patient knowledge of screening protocols, 50% picked 40 as the age to begin screening with 60% selected yearly as the appropriate interval. Related to institutional reminders, the split was 59:41 percent for not receiving a reminder versus getting a reminder letter. The top three cited reasons (up to three could be selected) for missing their annual mammogram was an unawareness they were due (22%), no family history of breast cancer (16%), and their doctor denied a need for an annual mammogram (14%). Some of the least selected reasons included lack of insurance, lack of time, and anxiety caused by mammograms. Patients did not commonly report negative attitudes towards their prior mammograms and most (57%) felt "fine" after their last exam.

Q7 - Do you receive a reminder when you are due for your mammogram?



# Conclusion:

Our study found that a majority of women who had not returned for their screening exam are aware of the need to begin screening at 40 yo and to return on an annual basis. Common reasons for not returning were that patients were not aware they were due, with 59% not remembering receiving a reminder letter, a sense of a lack of need due to no family history, and that their physicians did not advocate for screening mammography. It is possible that if our institution improved our reminder system and worked with referring physicians on screening recommendations, more patients would return on time for their screening mammogram.