



Mammography - Is It Effective?

Q: There has been some debate recently about mammograms. Are they still an effective way to detect breast cancer?

A: Breast cancer is a disease I take very seriously. I lost my two sisters to breast cancer. Sadly, they contracted the disease at a time when regular mammograms and improved treatment methods were not widely used or available.

If we are going to win the war on breast cancer, we must ensure that it is detected early enough to apply treatments effectively, which includes assuring that woman have access to regular mammographies.

Breast cancer is an epidemic in this country. One in every nine women will face breast cancer. Every three minutes, a woman is diagnosed, and every 13 minutes, a woman dies from the disease.

While there have been conflicting studies, getting a regular mammogram is still the best way to protect yourself from breast cancer. In fact, for women age 50 to 69, there is strong evidence that screening with mammograms on a regular basis reduces breast cancer deaths by 25 percent to 30 percent. Mammography saves lives.

That's why access to mammography is so critical. Several years ago, I worked to create a Medicare mammography benefit so that all of our seniors have access to this important tool in the fight against breast cancer. Unfortunately, Medicare payment rates for mammography haven't kept pace with rising medical costs. Health care providers find themselves losing money by offering mammograms.

That is why, as a part of my long-term efforts to fight breast cancer, I introduced the "Assure Access to Mammography Act." My legislation would expand access to mammograms by ensuring that health providers are adequately paid for the procedure. That will ensure that women in Iowa will have access to a regular mammogram that could help save their lives.

Let me be clear, mammography is not a cure all. As I have heard from breast cancer experts and survivors, it's one tool in the toolbox. The other tools are regular self-exams and yearly physicals. But, make no mistake, we must continue our efforts to improve treatments and eventually develop a cure for breast cancer. That is the ultimate victory.

The key is research. A decade ago, the federal government spent barely \$90 million on breast cancer research. Today, I am proud to say, we've increased that investment to about \$800 million. That investment is leading to new discoveries about the causes of breast cancer and its prevention, detection, diagnosis, treatment and control.

If we are going to win the war on breast cancer, we must ensure that it is detected early enough to apply treatments effectively, which includes assuring that woman have access to regular mammographies. And we must continue to invest in lifesaving breast cancer research. Together, we can win the fight against this terrible disease.