



Members of the community, hospital staff and volunteers gathered to celebrate the hospital's designation as an Ontario Breast Screening Program site

Ontario Breast Screening Program celebrated at Huntsville Hospital

By Dawn Huddlestone, Doppler Publisher on September 15, 2015 Community

On Monday, September 14, Huntsville Hospital staff, volunteers and community members gathered in the Garden of Honour at Huntsville District Memorial Hospital to celebrate the hospital's designation as a screening site for the Ontario Breast Screening Program (OBSP).

The hospital received the designation in the spring after a year-long accreditation and application process. "We were first required to receive accreditation from the Canadian Association of Radiology's Mammography Accreditation Program," explained Senior Mammography Technologist, Brenda Allen, who has been with the hospital's mammography unit since its inception in 1988. Accreditation included a review of staff qualifications, equipment performance, quality control and quality assurance programs, and image quality. They then applied to the Ontario Breast Screening Program and were accepted into the program on the first try.

It speaks to the quality of the care that was already available in Huntsville, said Noreen Chan, Manager of Diagnostic Imaging and Cardio-Respiratory for Muskoka Algonquin Health Care (MAHC). "Not every hospital passes (on their first application). Women in Huntsville will receive the same quality care they are accustomed to. It's just now easier to access."



The OBSP is available without a referral to women between the ages of 50 and 74 who are at average risk for breast cancer. "At age 50, women will receive a letter inviting them to participate in the program," said Melissa Mei, Lead, Prevention and Screening for Simcoe Muskoka Regional Cancer Program. "After her screening, she will receive results via mail. A copy will also be sent to their family doctor or nurse practitioner." If there is an abnormal finding, the woman will receive a call quickly and follow-up referrals will be scheduled.

Once a woman is in the program, she will receive a letter every two years reminding her to return for screening. Appointments can be made at any OBSP site – a cottager from Toronto could make an appointment in Huntsville while here during the summer months, for example. And women without a family physician or nurse practitioner can self-refer to the program.

Brenda Allen, Senior Mammography Technologist, demonstrates use of the digital mammography machine at Huntsville Hospital

“The file transfers with the patient to any OBSP site, making it a seamless process,” said Mei. “And there is a set time for each file to be closed which ensures no woman will fall through the cracks, even if she doesn’t have a family physician. If there is a woman in the program who receives an abnormal finding but who doesn’t have a family doctor, Cancer Care Ontario will assign someone to guide her through the steps needed next.”

There is a separate high-risk program for women with a greater than 25 per cent life-time risk of breast cancer. They may have the BRCA gene, a family history of breast cancer, or other indicators that would increase their risk. Women who are considered high risk or those who fall outside of the recommended 50- to 74-year-old range but still wish to be screened should speak with their family doctor.

“(Screening) does involve radiation so you don’t want to do it if it’s not proven that you need it,” said Chan. “For women in the recommended age range, it’s proven to help detect breast cancer. Older women who still want to have a mammogram can, they just fall outside of the program and would require a referral from their doctor.”



Brenda Allen, Senior Mammography Technologist, explains the image produced by a digital mammogram at Huntsville Hospital

MAHC CEO Natalie Bubela is delighted that the program has arrived in Huntsville. “It helps us to continue treating our community to the best of our ability. And it speaks to the generosity of our community that we have this state-of-the-art equipment available.” Huntsville’s mammography unit has had a digital mammography machine since 2009 – one of the first in Ontario to install one. The mammography unit now screens up to eighteen women per day.

One in nine Canadian women can expect to be diagnosed with breast cancer. In Ontario in 2014, it was estimated that 9,500 women would be diagnosed with the disease and 1,950 would die from it. While it can’t be prevented, early detection of breast cancer increases positive outcomes. Most women diagnosed with the disease have no family history of breast cancer, making screening that much more important.

There are several annual fundraising events that support the mammography unit, including the upcoming Bling Your Bra golf tournament at Diamond in the Ruff on September 23. Donations to the unit can also be made via the Huntsville Hospital Foundation.



Huntsville District Memorial Hospital received designation as an Ontario Breast Screening Program site in April 2015



Huntsville Hospital’s Digital Mammography Unit



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