Breast Cancer Assessment Wait Times

Wait times from an abnormal mammogram to first surgery for breast cancer patients have remained high since 2000. However, the wait times for a woman to find out that she did not have cancer have dropped.

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<td>Wait times for surgical excision of breast cancer after an abnormal mammogram</td>
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<td>Wait times for benign resolution after an abnormal mammogram</td>
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What’s new this year?
This report presents new data for 2005. The indicator combines wait times for women with an abnormal mammogram screened both in and outside the Ontario Breast Screening Program (OBSP). This measure provides a population-based analysis and includes women never enrolled in the OBSP.

See table next page.
Breast Cancer Assessment Wait Times

Median waits (in weeks) from abnormal screen to surgical excision for breast cancer patients, 2003, 2004, 2005

Sources: Cancer Care Ontario, Ontario Breast Screening Program; Ontario Health Insurance Plan database; Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) Discharge Abstract Database; Registered Persons Database; Analysis conducted by scientists in the Cancer Program at the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES) in Toronto

Notes:
1. *Estimate should be interpreted with caution because of relatively small sample size. Less than 100 women with abnormal screens in this LHIN.
2. To measure wait times for this analysis, women were followed for a maximum of 1 year until date of surgical excision.
What do the results show?

- For women with breast cancer, the wait times after an abnormal mammogram to their first surgery have remained relatively unchanged between 2003 and 2005 (consistently 20 weeks). *Figure 1.*
- For women who have an abnormal mammogram that turns out to be benign, the wait times for a benign diagnosis have dropped by 1 week. *Figure 2.* This wait time has dropped both within and outside the OBSP (not shown in graph), and may be explained by the additional OBSP and other non-OBSP breast assessment affiliates.
• Across LHINs, there are variations in how long women wait for a diagnosis after an abnormal mammogram.
• In 2005, the most recent year analyzed, the shortest wait times between an abnormal mammogram and surgical excision for cancer were in the Waterloo Wellington LHIN (13 weeks). Figure 1. Although the variation in wait times between LHINs is large, there is no difference in the interval between a positive mammogram and first breast surgery between women from OBSP and those not from OBSP (not shown in graph).
• In 2005, the shortest wait times for women to find out they did not have breast cancer was in the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant LHIN (3 weeks). Figure 2

Why is this important to patient care?
• Unnecessary delays in assessing an abnormal mammogram can contribute to patient anxiety. Psychological distress has been shown to intensify with increasing lengths of delay to diagnosis.1
• Canadian Medical Association practice guidelines for breast cancer emphasize that diagnostic tests done on a lump in the breast should be completed as soon as possible after detection2 and research suggests that a long delay between an abnormal mammogram and a diagnosis of breast cancer is associated with adverse outcomes.3

How does Ontario compare?
• More than 79% of women enrolled in the OBSP were screened within the 3.0 week target (breast screening to first assessment), whereas in Alberta only 50% met this target.4
• Nova Scotia reports similar waiting times: a recent study revealed a median wait of 91 days (13 weeks) between abnormal screen and first treatment for breast cancer5. In Saskatchewan, the wait between suspicion of breast cancer and final mode of treatment (either surgery or adjuvant therapy) is 17 weeks (120 days). However, it should be noted that this time period includes the first surgical excision, which occurs approximately 9 weeks earlier.6
• In the U.K., the median time from general practitioner referral to first breast cancer treatment was 27 days for urgent referrals and 35 days for less urgent referrals.7 This 4 to 5 week wait is shorter than waits in Ontario.

What is being done?
• In 2005, the OBSP’s sites provided breast screening to 240,703
women between the ages of 50 and 69. Of these, 1,081 cases of cancer were detected. In its 2007-08 Budget, the Ontario Government has committed to increasing support to the OBSP so that the program can complete 600,000 screens or more, per year, by 2010-11.

- Cancer Care Ontario is promoting and recruiting additional screening and breast assessment affiliates in Ontario. In 2006/07, nine new screening sites joined the OBSP, including 3 new assessment affiliates (for women requiring follow-up tests). In 2007/08, the Program plans to affiliate with up to 17 new breast screening sites and 14 new breast assessment affiliates.
- Cancer Care Ontario is exploring the use of rapid diagnostic assessment units, where a skilled investigative team can provide fast diagnosis or immediate discharge of women with benign results.

Technical information
Definitions
- Breast cancer assessment is the process of diagnosing an abnormal mammogram result
- This indicator measures the time, in weeks, from the date of a bilateral mammogram to the date of last breast assessment procedure for women without breast cancer, or the date of first surgical excision for women with breast cancer
- "Resolution" of mammogram includes last procedure, including imaging
- To measure wait times for this analysis, women were followed for a maximum of one year
- Includes screen-eligible women (ages 50-69), 2000-2005
- Analysis excluded women with a prior diagnosis of breast cancer

Data Sources
- Cancer Care Ontario, Ontario Breast Screening Program
- Ontario Health Insurance Plan database
- Canadian Institute for Health Information Discharge Abstract Database
- Registered Persons Database

Data Quality
- Completeness
- Timeliness
- Accuracy
Accuracy

- This data does not consider urgency of abnormal screens. It has been found that women with high-suspicion screens are investigated more promptly than women with intermediate-suspicion.

Notes

6. Health Quality Council. The time it takes: Breast cancer care in Saskatchewan. Research Report October 2006; http://www.hqc.sk.ca/portal.jsp?ZKrK3sr9sd2+FmD5hljG+TBlzBfoQfLQkUwK4QBZaJu j1gO5uSLN3YzOVCa+lmY4