

ConvenientCare Mammography

Grant Medical Center's novel program increases access to screening mammography and improves compliance

by Fran Feehan, MBA

We all know that if you widen the funnel to capture more people through community-based screenings, you are likely to wind up with more people being diagnosed and treated in your facility. While the concept makes good business sense, it is also in the best interest of our patients—not to mention, simply being the right thing to do. Unfortunately, as consumers of healthcare ourselves, we also recognize that screenings are rarely convenient and almost never fun, making them easy to postpone or put off indefinitely. With those two realities in mind, Grant Medical Center created a novel program, ConvenientCare Mammography, which basically delivers patients right to our front door for mammograms.

Grant Medical Center sits in the heart of downtown Columbus, Ohio. Based on 2000 Census data, approximately 33,000 women who are 40 years of age or older commute into the area every day to work. We wanted a unique way to reach out and help these women get their annual screening mammograms. Aside from the typical headaches of accessing healthcare (long wait times, confusing and conflicting directions, etc.), two common hurdles consumers often face are lack of a car and inconvenient workplace parking. We challenged ourselves to create a screening program that eliminated those issues, thereby removing any “excuse” for a woman to avoid her annual screening mammogram.

Today we hold our ConvenientCare Mammography up to three times each week. Since November 2004 the program has resulted in more than 2,100 screening mammograms. Our program has grown year after year, with an average annual growth of 29 percent. Some women have returned to the program three or more times. The key ingredient to our program's success is true convenience built into the simple design. Almost all of the work is done ahead of time so the women enjoy little to no waiting time. How? First, we provide transportation so the women do not have to drive and worry about losing their parking spots at work or finding parking at the hospital. Our different departments work seamlessly together to make our mammography screening an efficient, even enjoyable experience. Further, the screening happens over the lunch hour so women do not have to schedule the mammograms on their time off.

How Our Program Works

Grant Medical Center partners with individual businesses in the downtown Columbus area, relying on their existing, internal communication vehicles to spread the word about our ConvenientCare Mammography. Each business has its own screening date scheduled in advance. (We schedule monthly pick-ups from some of the larger businesses or those with strong program participation.)

Once the screening date is determined, the business alerts its female workforce. Grant Medical Center has developed posters, flyers, and email alerts that businesses can use to help spread the word about the screening event. If a woman is interested, she simply calls our program coordinator directly to sign up.

After that initial call, our program coordinator passes the woman's basic information to the pre-registration staff of our healthcare system. Someone from the pre-reg staff calls the patient—either at work or at home—and completes the full registration process over the phone. This process generally takes place a few days in advance of the scheduled mammogram screening.

We also email a history or intake form to women so that they can bring the completed form with them when they board our shuttle. We ask each woman to hand the intake form to our mammography technicians at the time of the actual mammogram. A recent process improvement we have made is to have a registration staff member on the shuttle when we pick up the women. Today, consent forms are signed and armbands applied before the women even arrive at our breast center. (Prior to that process improvement, those two steps were completed when the women arrived at the breast center.)

Grant Medical Center uses a patient transport service at one of its sister hospitals to provide the shuttle and driver. The shuttles are 13-passenger vans that allow patients to stand upright while finding a seat. The vans are all equipped with wheelchair access and have handrails for the women as they climb aboard and depart.

When the shuttle arrives at the hospital, it pulls up directly in front of the Breast Center. Our program coordinator escorts the women straight to the Breast Center and into the changing area. Our ConvenientCare Mammography process is so streamlined—with all registration components completed in advance, either by phone or on the shuttle—that there is no waiting time for program participants.

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A patient at Grant Medical Center disembarks from the shuttle for her mammogram.

This amount of pre-work allows us to comfortably screen up to eight women in an hour without anyone feeling rushed.

Once gowned, women are escorted back for their mammograms individually by our technologists. After women are screened and have changed back into their clothes, the program coordinator escorts them to a conference room located in the Breast Health Center. Here the women are given a small snack, something to drink, and the opportunity to chat or read while they wait for their colleagues to finish. This downtime is the only waiting that is done throughout the entire process.

We have found several benefits to gathering our ConvenientCare Mammography patients in a conference room. For example, it allows us to keep our relatively small waiting areas open for other patients who are arriving for their screenings or procedures. Also, the conference room offers a more relaxed environment that allows these women to talk about work, family, and more, away from patients who might be anxiously awaiting a breast biopsy.

So Why Mammograms?

In November 2009 the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force released updated recommendations on screening mammograms that shifted significantly from long-held beliefs on the practice of mammography. However, the Medical Advisory Committee of the Breast Health Institute at our healthcare system continues to agree with the guidelines held by the American Cancer Society (ACS). We strongly believe in the value not only of regular screening mammograms, but also of clinical breast exams by a physician and self breast exams. As part of our cancer care program, we advocate for early detection through screening whenever possible. Grant Medical Center is fortunate to have been able to develop a proven, cost-effective method for screening large populations of patients for breast cancer. It is our hope that this model can be adapted and used by other community cancer centers. And while our model may not work for many community cancer centers, we strongly support doing whatever is possible to increase mammography rates across the country.

In these tough economic times, mammography is also a great tool for marketing our facility, our program, and our physicians. Women are the known healthcare decision makers for their families, so we want to shepherd them to our facility and show them amazing customer service and seamless teamwork.¹ In addition to providing information on general breast health and breast cancer, we are able to talk to these women about our wonderful physicians and our other clini-

cal staff. This unique small-group experience allows Grant Medical Center to market its programs directly to potential returning patients. Women participating in our ConvenientCare Mammography program are able to meet our caring staff and see firsthand our comfortable, invit-

ing facility and the latest technology we offer.

To the best of our knowledge, our ConvenientCare Mammography program has diagnosed two women with early-stage breast cancer. If a woman received her follow-up imaging and was diagnosed at another facility, *after* her screening mammogram with us, we are not able to track her progress. At least a dozen women have required diagnostic mammograms and/or breast ultrasounds. As we try to determine the best method for identifying women who require follow-up imaging, we see this as yet another process improvement opportunity.

Screening mammograms are not a profitable service for any community cancer center; however, the costs of providing this service are quite low. The programmatic benefits include:

- Providing an important public health service
- Elevating the hospital's profile in the community
- Retaining patients for additional services, if required.

By addressing some of the more basic roadblocks to accessing preventive care, such as transportation and scheduling constraints, other community cancer centers can enjoy the successes we have enjoyed. Grant Medical Center has developed an innovative yet still simple process that has greatly expanded access to a life-saving service. Women have told us countless times that they would not have received a mammogram if not for our ConvenientCare Mammography. Based on these factors, Grant Medical Center is actively considering ways to expand this program and its outreach.

In closing, we challenge other cancer centers to look critically at your community. Study your demographic data. Do not make any assumptions. Respond with a service that meets your patients' needs. 📍

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References

¹Salganicoff A, Ranji UR. Women and Health Care: A National Profile. Kaiser Family Foundation; 2005. Available online at: <http://www.kff.org/womenshealth/7336.cfm>.