



**BC Cancer Agency**

CARE + RESEARCH

An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority

**Screening Mammography Program**



### **MYTH-BREAKERS**

Breast cancer is often spoken about in hushed tones – so sometimes the information is not fully heard or understood. The following information attempts to address some misconceptions about screening mammograms. Screening mammograms are one of the most effective tools available to detect breast cancer early; which means more treatment options and a better chance to recover.

### **COMPRESSION**

#### **Aren't mammograms painful?**

For the mammogram to be effective, the breast needs to be compressed. Compression gives the best possible image of the breast with the *least* amount of radiation. Each compression only lasts a couple of seconds. Most women say it is uncomfortable, but tolerable.

#### **If I have breast cancer can the compression cause the cancer to spread?**

No. Compression is safe and will not harm your breasts or cause any existing cancer to spread.

### **RADIATION**

#### **Doesn't radiation cause cancer?**

We are all exposed to background radiation. Background radiation exists in the ground we walk on and the air we breathe. A screening mammogram exposes you to the same amount of radiation as a plane ride from Canada to Australia and back. Consider the benefits – mammograms detect about 85% of cancer at its early stage offering more treatment options and a better chance of recovery. Women in Stage 1 breast cancer have a 98% survival rate after 5 years.

#### **What are the quality controls at Screening Mammography Centres?**

SMP adheres to standards set by the Canadian Association of Radiologists-Mammography Accreditation Program ([CAR-MAP](#)). All SMP centres are CAR accredited or actively pursuing accreditation. BC Cancer Agency's SMP has safe standards of practice, which include testing our equipment each year to make sure safety is maintained.

### **FINAL WORD**

Since women often have many people depending on them, from husbands, children, parents, etc. – they may fear burdening their loved ones and would rather not know if they are ill. However, we believe it is much better to find the cancer at an early, treatable stage and help avoid the heartbreak of losing a loved one prematurely. Cancer is not an automatic death sentence. There are many survivors who are now living full, cancer-free lives. “Survivors” often refer to themselves as “Thrivers” because they appreciate every life minute and flourish within every moment of their lives.