

suburban life

Dr. Russell Mark
Reisner discusses
the many ways in
which **St. Mary
Breast Center**
keeps patients
safe and whole
in the time of
COVID-19.

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Preserve and Protect

From routine screenings to urgent surgical care, St. Mary Breast Center goes to great lengths to keep patients safe and whole in the time of COVID-19.

by BILL DONAHUE

The threat of COVID-19 has persuaded many people to reschedule preventive medical care until the proverbial dust settles. As it relates to screening for breast cancer, some women are left to wonder if they made the right decision by waiting: If I do have a problem, did I lose valuable time by postponing my mammogram?

Russell Mark Reisner, M.D., a breast surgical oncologist at St. Mary Breast Center and the head of St. Mary Complete Breast Care, both in Langhorne, has two messages for these individuals: First, rest assured, because delaying a mammogram for a few months is unlikely to have serious consequences; and second, it's now safe to come in for routine mammograms or reschedule those that may have been postponed.

"Screening doesn't prevent cancer, but the goal is to identify the cancer such that the patient has the best possible chance at a recovery and cure for the disease," he says. "We recognize that it's important to

treat the disease at the earliest stage, but we also know that cancers are not an infection that can grow over a matter of days. When cancer is found, it has probably been there for a year or two without being at a detectable stage."

Even so, Dr. Reisner describes routine screening as "vitaly important," with as many as one in eight women testing positive for breast cancer over the course of their lifetimes. He just wants patients to feel comfortable doing so, and let them know St. Mary has taken considerable precautions to protect patients from COVID-19.

"When COVID-19 struck and we stopped doing routine screenings, patients were rightly concerned, wondering if they were losing precious time," he adds. "We never stopped offering urgent screenings or breast evaluations to those patients who have been identified to have a problem. We're once again offering [routine] screenings."

All mammography occurs in the confines of the St. Mary Breast Center with fellowship-trained, dedicated breast radiologists. Anyone who comes in for a breast screening

will be far removed from patients who are being actively treated for COVID-19. In addition, St. Mary has instituted a number of other protections for all patients, such as efforts to maintain social distance, a pre-screening questionnaire, COVID-19-free entrances, requiring anyone entering the facility to wear a facemask, and taking the temperature of anyone who enters the facility.

Dr. Reisner suggests women should begin routine mammograms at age 40. If no abnormalities are found, they can then come back every other year until age 45, and then have a mammogram every year until age 70. For those who have a family history, Dr. Reisner recommends beginning the screening process 10 years earlier than the age of the parent or family member when first diagnosed. Patients with a higher-than-average risk may benefit from advanced screening procedures, such as a breast MRI.

When a screening reveals an incidence of cancer, Dr. Reisner works closely with women—and men, too, as breast cancer spares neither gender—to determine a path forward. Whereas some women may prefer a lumpectomy to conserve as much breast tissue as possible, others may prefer more dramatic measures, such as a mastectomy, to reduce the risk of reoccurrence. No matter which path she chooses, Dr. Reisner says St. Mary's surgical team aims to help each patient "maintain her overall sense of well-being" through breast reconstruction.

"Many years ago the only goal for breast cancer surgery was to remove the tumor," he says. "Much has changed since then. Part of my job is to make sure a patient is happy with the appearance of her breast after surgery."

Going forward, St. Mary Breast Center will maintain measures to protect the health of each patient, not only against cancer but also against COVID-19. Dr. Reisner suggests patients can expect to see the continued use of telemedicine through a secure, HIPAA-compliant network. This convenience has proven particularly helpful for conducting follow-up evaluations with existing patients.

"We've made remarkable strides with COVID-19, and now it's important to maintain the progress we have achieved and guard against a resurgence," he says. "I wouldn't be surprised if telemedicine became an even bigger part of our armamentarium. At the same time, women should understand that if they need an office visit, we can provide that for them in as safe an environment as possible." ■



Call (215) 710-2208 to schedule a mammogram or (215) 710-4130 to make an appointment with St. Mary Complete Breast Care. Visit trinityhealthma.org for more information.