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New poll: 79% of American women think new breast cancer recommendations will cause rise in deaths

Few plan to follow the new guidelines

WASHINGTON, D.C., December 1, 2009 – American women are deeply skeptical about new guidelines for breast cancer detection released by the United States Preventative Services Task Force (USPSTF) last month, a new survey finds.

Penn Schoen Berland, a research-based consultancy, interviewed 500 female Americans and found that 62% are aware of the new recommendations, which specify that women begin receiving mammograms every two years (instead of yearly, as is the current practice) beginning at age 50 (instead of 40). However, fewer than 2 in 10 women knew that the USPSTF made the recommendations, and a majority incorrectly believe that the guidelines will impact women under 40.

Despite the lack of clarity, women are certain the guidelines are wrong. 61% see mammography as the best way to detect breast cancer, and accordingly 72% disagree with the new guidelines. 70% believe that the new screening recommendations will harm women and their health.

As a result, women are currently not planning to follow the guidelines. 81% of women 18-39 say that they still plan to start getting regular mammograms at age 40, and 71% say they plan to get mammograms yearly. And 63% of women aged 40-49 plan to continue getting mammograms every year.

“American women’s response to the USPSTF’s recommendations is a reminder that on highly sensitive health matters including breast cancer treatments, communicating change successfully requires a high level of public trust,” said Jonathan Kay, Vice President of PSB’s Health Care Practice. “Women trust their doctors to act in the best interest of their health (95%), but 56% do not trust the USPSTF; meaning that the future of the revised guidelines are firmly in doctors’ hands.”

Other key findings of the survey include:

- 98% believe that mammograms for women aged 40-49 should be covered by insurance companies even if the new guidelines are adopted.
- 70% believe new screening recommendations will cause healthcare costs to increase because fewer breast cancer cases will be caught early.
- 79% believe new screening recommendations will increase the number of breast cancer deaths because fewer cases will be caught early.
- 71% agree that “There can never be too many screenings for breast cancer, no matter if you are at risk or not.”

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Research Methodology: Penn, Schoen and Berland Associates conducted an online quantitative survey with 500 US females over the age of 18 on November 23-24, 2009. The margin of error is +/-4.38% and is larger for subgroups.

About Penn Schoen Berland

Penn Schoen Berland is a global research-based consultancy that specializes in messaging and communications strategy for blue-chip political, corporate and entertainment clients. We have over 30 years of experience leveraging unique insights about public opinion to provide clients with a competitive advantage - what we call Winning Knowledge™. We execute polling and message testing services for Fortune 100 corporations and have helped elect more than 30 presidents and prime ministers around the world. Penn Schoen Berland is a part of Young & Rubicam Brands, a subsidiary of WPP, one of the world's leading communications services networks. More information is available at www.psbresearch.com.