

Sunday October 07, 2012

MEDIA ALERT – ATTENTION NEWS PRODUCERS AND CHIEFS OF STAFF

Early diagnosis of breast cancer at risk due to underfunding, warns radiologists

Women at risk of breast cancer are struggling to access affordable, timely and accurate diagnosis due to chronic underfunding of mammogram, ultrasound, MRI and guided biopsy procedures, warns the peak body for radiology providers.

President of the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association, Dr Sue Ulreich, today called on the Federal Government to close the gap in the fees that thousands of women face when they seek radiology services to determine if they have breast cancer.

As part of Breast Cancer Awareness week, radiologists are standing up for their women patients – many of whom can't afford to access the potentially life saving imaging procedures - because the rebates have not been indexed for 14 years and the gap for such expensive procedures are proving too big for many patients.

Dr Ulreich says that most women with breast cancer have undergone a mammogram, breast ultrasound and image guided biopsy to detect and diagnose their cancer and, after treatment they undergo further follow up imaging.

"This can cost women hundreds of dollars in the initial diagnosis and ongoing yearly imaging follow-up, due to the inadequacy of Medicare rebates," says Dr Ulreich. "A Medicare-funded MRI of the breasts is only available for limited indications and potentially adds further costs."

While the BreastScreen program screens asymptomatic patients, diagnostic mammography is needed to assess symptomatic women.

When the mammogram or a breast ultrasound indicates a mass, an image guided intervention (biopsy or aspiration) is performed by an experienced radiologist to confirm whether the breast pathology is cancerous. However, due to the rising cost of providing these services, many diagnostic imaging practices now do not offer mammography services, and many women seeking access to these have to pay significant out of pocket fees.

"Women and their families have a right to know they can get early and accurate diagnosis of breast cancer regardless of where they live or what their socioeconomic backgrounds are," says Dr Ulreich.

"Many breast cancers can be treated effectively if detected early," she says. "With one in nine women likely to have breast cancer before they turn 85, we believe that, at the very least, indexation for rebates for diagnostic imaging must be put in place."

Dr Ulreich says she is looking forward to working with the Minister for Health in ensuring women's health remains a priority and equity of access to diagnostic imaging is assured. ENDS

For media enquiries:

Please contact Dr Sue Ulreich, President on 08 9320 1202 or 0439 381 162 or

Ms Pattie Beerens, CEO on 03 9867 5070 or 0419 810 044

Please note Dr Ulreich is a practising radiologist based in Perth and may be with patients at the time of media calls.

ADIA represents private diagnostic imaging practices in Australia. They diagnose and treat patients every day and operate 80% of the comprehensive practices providing services to patients in rural and regional Australia. ADIA members are both for-profit and charitable and operate practices in the community and in public and private hospitals in Australia.