

## EARLY DETECTION MATTERS

Re To Decide On Breast Cancer Screening, Women Must Be Armed With The Right Information (Dec. 11): I am a breast cancer researcher at Sunnybrook Hospital Research Institute, the Ontario Institute for Cancer Research, and

a medical biophysics professor at the University of Toronto. I have been working in this area for almost 40 years; my lab was instrumental in developing and testing digital mammography, which is now the international standard for breast cancer detection.

Renée Pellerin is correct: To decide on breast cancer screening, women must be armed with the right information. Where she errs is in suggesting this information will come from the Canadian Task Force (TF) Guidelines. In fact, modern data from Canada and other countries show mortality reductions of up to 47 per cent in women 40-74 years of age who get screened with mammography.

Most women would disagree that the few days of stress after a screening callback outweigh 20 years of life added when a cancer death is prevented by earlier detection. Earlier detection does matter. Getting screening in their 40s could save 400 Canadian women's lives each year. Finding cancers earlier often removes the need to have harsh therapies such as mastectomies and chemotherapy. The TF has failed Canadians. Women and health providers deserve more accurate information.

■ **Martin J. Yaffe**  
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