Breast Thermography

The Kaiser Permanente Breast Care Advisory Committee has completed a literature review of thermography for breast cancer screening. According to two major technology review board summaries, breast thermography has not demonstrated value as a screening, diagnostic, or adjunctive imaging tool and is not currently endorsed by any reputable medical agency including:

- American Cancer Society
- American College of Radiology
- American Medical Association
- Kaiser Permanente, Northern and Southern California Regions
- Medicare
- National Cancer Institute

In a study conducted in 1996 of 420 patients with known breast cancer, only 78 patients (18%) had abnormal thermography. In another large clinical trial, researchers concluded that the rate of cancers developing in patients with positive thermography results was not significantly different from the rate in patients with negative results, meaning that thermography did not find the cancers known to be present in these women.

Thermography measures skin temperature only. According to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the procedure is safe but does not detect or provide diagnosis of any condition. Equipment is purchased independently for office use. There is no credentialing needed and referrals are made by the physician who recommends the test. This same physician will usually receive the payment for the test, creating a conflict of interest.

Joanne Schottinger, MD, a Kaiser Permanente Medical Group Oncologist, recently gave this expert clinical opinion about using thermography for breast cancer screening instead of mammography:

"Mammography has been well demonstrated in randomized clinical trials with over 500,000 women to decrease breast cancer mortality in screened women. There is no evidence, no randomized trials that demonstrate a benefit for screening with thermography. Thermography can miss many lesions and also has high false positive rates."

Mammography has been proven to save lives by catching breast cancer early.

Thermography has not been shown to aid in the diagnosis of breast cancer in any way.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.