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YSC Responds to New Mammography Guidelines

November 17, 2009 -- While the new U.S. Preventive Services Task Force's recommendations on screening mammography, clinical breast exam and self-examination do not directly impact the young breast cancer survivors served by Young Survival Coalition (YSC), we are concerned about the recommendation of such significant changes. Although mammograms are not perfect tests, the evidence has clearly shown that they save lives in older women and should be available for all women for whom such screening is appropriate. Further, the Task Force's recommendations deal only with average risk women, not screening in higher risk women including screening residual breast tissue of young and old survivors. For these populations there is not enough scientific data to change current recommendations. YSC believes that better tools are urgently needed for younger women regardless of their risk level.

This current debate regarding the effectiveness of mammograms highlights the issues facing young women. While over 11,000 women under 40 in the United States are diagnosed with breast cancer annually, there is still no screening method for early detection of breast cancer in young women. Survival rates for young women diagnosed with breast cancer are significantly worse than their older counterparts and the disease is often detected at later stages and is found to be more aggressive. Without access to proper and timely care, a woman's odds for survival decrease.

Mammography has been found to be an ineffective screening mechanism for this population because of their breast density. Accordingly YSC urges all young women to be familiar with their bodies, know their own personal risk factors for breast cancer, be aware of the signs of breast malignancies and to promptly consult with their health provider if they have any health concerns.