



Saint Alphonsus
BREAST CARE CENTER

WOMEN'S MOBILE HEALTH CLINIC ...

A MATTER OF TIME

Timing is EVERYTHING

Edit. Undo. Rewind. In 2011, these terms are familiar to nearly all of us. With modern technology, there are countless opportunities to go back, correct oversights, and get a second chance.

But with breast cancer, there is no going back. There is a limited window of time to detect this potentially fatal disease during an earlier, and more readily treatable, stage. A limited window of time before a cancer that originated as a few rogue cells in a woman's breast advances too far into her body, beyond the reach of modern medicine. Early detection is essential to a woman's chances of surviving breast cancer; there is no second chance to receive a timely diagnosis.

The timing of a breast cancer diagnosis holds critical implications for a woman's overall prognosis. When a new case is identified, it is assigned a "stage," indicating the size of the tumor, and whether or not the cancer has spread from the breast to nearby lymph nodes (providing a convenient transit route to the rest of the body) or advanced to distant bodily organs. The five-year survival rate for women diagnosed with Stage 0 breast cancers is a highly encouraging 100%; this rate remains a still-optimistic 98% and 88% for Stage I and II, respectively. However, for cancers diagnosed in a more advanced stage, the prognosis is far more disheartening (56% at Stage III, and 16% at Stage IV).

In 2011, mammography remains the best available tool to detect breast cancer in the earliest possible stage, enabling healthcare providers to deliver this dreaded diagnosis along with the precious words, "*We caught it in time.*" However, too many women living in southwestern Idaho continue to forgo this screening – women who face significant insurance, financial, geographic, or social barriers to accessing routine mammographies. Too many women in our communities are at risk of dying, unnecessarily, from a potentially survivable disease.

Regrettably, Idaho consistently reports among the lowest mammography rates in the U.S., with screening particularly low in the southwestern portion of the state. Among the rural counties served by the Saint Alphonsus Health System, the average reported mammography adherence/clinical breast examination rate of 60% remains well below both state and national averages; individual counties have reported rates as low as 44%. (By comparison, the percentage of U.S. women ages 40 and older who report undergoing a mammogram within the past two years is 76%; for U.S. women ages 50 and older, the percentage is closer to 80%.)

Since the early '90s, the Breast Care Center's mobile mammography unit has traveled to remote communities throughout southwestern Idaho, in order bring breast cancer detection services directly to women who would otherwise be unable, or unlikely, to seek this potentially life-saving screening. Staffed by highly experienced women's health professionals, the Women's Mobile Health Clinic provides digital mammography and clinical breast exams comparable to those available in the region's most state-of-the-art breast imaging facilities. Saint Al's assists women to access patient assistance programs to overcome any insurance or financial barriers to screening. The mobile clinic logs roughly 13,000 miles every year to reach nearly 3,000 women residing in more than 20 rural Idaho, Oregon, and Nevada counties, providing peace of mind for the majority of patients – and buying precious time for others receiving abnormal screening results that may ultimately lead to a breast cancer diagnosis.

Timely, Convenient Care

The Women's Mobile Health Clinic travel route spans more than 100 miles east to west and more than 270 miles north to south. Patients also travel to the mobile clinic's southwestern Idaho destinations from as far away as eastern Idaho and the Oregon coast. Traversing the region's back-country roads four to five days every week, the mobile unit is designed to serve women who are living in remote rural communities and who lack the resources to travel to urban areas for screening. The mobile clinic's primary service area includes 10 southwestern Idaho counties (Idaho Health Districts 3 and 4) as well as a number of bordering western Idaho locales, home to more than 160,000 women ages 35 and older. Communities situated in this region are considered to be largely rural and geographically isolated, and in many cases, "frontier" – the federal definition for the most remote and sparsely populated areas of the United States. The Women's Mobile Health Clinic also serves a Shoshone Paiute Native American Reservation situated along the southern Idaho/northern Nevada border.

On average, the Saint Alphonsus mobile program cares for nearly 3,000 women each year, more than 80% of whom reside in rural communities. During the most recent reporting period, patients from a total of 24 Idaho, Oregon, and Nevada counties accessed the program.

The mobile clinic offers state-of-the-art mammography as well as clinical breast exam services. Featuring a digital mammography suite, exam table, and registration office, and staffed by two full-time radiology technicians, the mobile is equipped to offer routine breast cancer screenings comparable to those available in Idaho's most advanced fixed healthcare sites. Saint Alphonsus utilizes qualified medical interpretation services to ensure access to limited-English-speaking women; the mobile clinic is also accessible to the disabled.

The Women's Mobile Health Clinic has historically collaborated with more than 70 different local host sites; these partners offer parking space for the 40-foot vehicle, conduct outreach to encourage their clientele to undergo breast cancer screening, and help to schedule local women for their mobile appointments. Host sites include family medicine practices, fitness clubs, insurance companies, senior centers, health and human service agencies, schools, churches, and health fairs. Saint Alphonsus partners with physician practices, the Comprehensive Cancer Alliance for Idaho, Operation Pink B.A.G., and other women's health advocates throughout the region to conduct breast health outreach; local advertising also helps to support awareness and scheduling efforts.

In order to ensure access by uninsured, underinsured, and low-income women, the Breast Care Center coordinates free mammograms and clinical breast exams through the *Women's Health Check* program administered by the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare. For disadvantaged patients who do not qualify for *Health Check*, patient assistance funding is available in partnership with charitable organizations such as the Susan G. Komen Foundation, the Saint Alphonsus Women's Healthcare Fund "Secret Sisters" program, and others. For insured patients, the costs of screening services are offset by Medicaid and Medicare billing, and other third-party commercial plan reimbursement.

Mobile patients receiving abnormal mammography results continue to receive support and referrals to access diagnostic services and, if a new breast cancer case is confirmed, oncology treatment. Financially challenged patients are assisted to secure patient assistance funding toward diagnostic mammograms, and are referred to their nearest hospital-based imaging center for procedures. For patients who are not established with a primary care physician, the Breast Care Center assumes the role of care coordinator, either making a referral to a trusted primary care provider in the patient's home region to manage their care, or making a direct referral to the nearest surgical or oncology team, as appropriate.

The Women's Mobile Health Clinic was first envisioned by local women's health advocates who believed that every woman deserves a lifetime, and no woman in our region should ever hear, "*We may not have caught it in time.*" Without programs such as this, women living in rural and geographically isolated communities would lack access to breast cancer screening services comparable to those available to urban residents – or would lack access to any early detection services, at all. For women who have built their lives in remote Idaho communities, limited access to family physicians and gynecologists, inadequate insurance coverage, and financial constraints pose real hurdles to accessing routine breast cancer screening. These challenges, paired with great distances to breast imaging facilities, result in alarmingly low numbers of rural Idaho women who access routine screening. Limited access to screening services among so many of Idaho's women translates into a greater likelihood of late-stage diagnoses – and presumably higher mortality rates. Not only are Idaho's rural breast cancer patients more likely to be diagnosed in an advanced stage, they are least likely to have access to best-practice healthcare and the financial resources necessary to treat and manage a late-stage diagnosis.

- ① Women who are uninsured and/or who reside in a rural area are among the *least likely* to access routine screenings for breast cancer.
- ① Within the region served by the Women's Mobile Health Clinic, nearly all counties contain Medically Underserved Areas/Populations and Primary Care Health Professional Shortages. These are federal designations which indicate a lack of basic healthcare services, and suggest that the general population experiences significant economic, cultural or linguistic barriers to healthcare.
- ① Women are far more likely to schedule a mammogram when they are prompted by a trusted healthcare provider. Women in outlying locales who lack access to routine primary care are less likely to receive screening referrals, personal risk assessments, and annual reminders.
- ① Within the region served by the Women's Mobile Health Clinic, the percentage of adult women who lack insurance coverage varies from 15 to 25%; the average uninsured rate (by county) in the service area is 18%. As a result, as many as one out of five women may have to rely on a patient assistance program, such as those available to Women's Mobile Health Clinic patients, to obtain routine mammographies and clinical breast examinations.
- ① Of those women served by the mobile clinic during the most recent reporting period, 11% were Medicaid subscribers and 26% were enrolled in Medicare, indicating very low or fixed incomes among more than one-third of patients served; nearly 200 women lacked any insurance coverage.
- ① Among Idaho women under the age of 65, uninsured patients and Medicaid enrollees report the highest rates of late-stage-diagnosed breast cancer, compared to those covered by private insurance.
- ① Idaho counties housing a facility-based breast imaging center report higher mammography rates than counties without such resources; less than half the counties in southwestern Idaho contain such a center. Many women within the service area face a drive of more than two hours to the nearest fixed mammography provider – in *ideal* driving conditions – limiting their ability to seek screening.
- ① Nearly one-third of all Idaho breast cancer cases are detected in an advanced stage – a percentage that has remained unchanged for nearly a decade.
- ① Breast cancer continues to account for the second highest number of cancer deaths among women in the state of Idaho. In the majority of counties served by the Women's Mobile Health Clinic, breast cancer mortality rates exceed the Idaho state average, with one county reporting a heart-wrenching breast cancer mortality rate of 47%. Breast cancer prevalence also exceeds the national average in more than half of these rural counties.
- ① In 2010, services provided through the Women's Mobile Health Clinic led to the diagnosis of 16 cases of breast cancer which may have otherwise gone undetected – providing 16 women and their families with a greater hope of overcoming this disease.

It's Only a Matter of Time

Ironically, as continued research, evolving treatments, and early detection efforts have increased the overall survivability of breast cancer, the increasing prevalence of this disease looms as a larger threat than ever before. During the past 50 years, a woman's lifetime risk of developing breast cancer has nearly tripled, from one in 20 in the 1960s, to a startling current estimated lifetime risk of *one in 8*. While research continues “around the clock” to yield advances in prevention and treatment, 12.2% of all women alive today are projected to receive a breast cancer diagnosis by their 85th birthday. Faced with this daunting risk, it's only a matter of time before each one of us – anyone with a beloved grandmother, mother, aunt, wife, sister, daughter, niece, granddaughter or close female friend – is personally and profoundly impacted by this disease. (Woman can calculate their current and lifetime estimated risk by visiting www.cancer.gov/bcrisktool/.)

With insufficient and often conflicting information about the suspected causes of breast cancer, early detection remains the best hope that we have for every woman in southwestern Idaho to celebrate every possible birthday – hers, as well as those of the many people who rely on her. For thousands of disadvantaged Idaho women, the Women’s Mobile Health Clinic is an indispensable tool in the local, personal, and very real fight against breast cancer.

After more than 10 years of dedicated service, the current Women’s Mobile Health Clinic vehicle itself is facing an uncertain future. Following weekly travel over back-country roads spanning roughly nearly half of the state, the Women’s Mobile Health Clinic is beginning to show its age at 120,000 miles ... and counting. In 2010, the 40-foot vehicle was sidelined more and more often by unscheduled visits to correct maintenance problems, resulting in delayed screening and inconvenience for hundreds of women who rely on the unit as their primary breast health resource. Unfortunately, the existing mobile clinic may be deemed unsafe for long-distance travel in the very near future, jeopardizing early detection services on behalf of approximately 3,000 medically underserved women each year. The need to replace the older vehicle – with a comparably digitally-equipped unit, custom-built to meet the demands of southwestern Idaho travel – is becoming urgent.

Right on Time ... to Make a Critical Difference

“WHEN YOU DO NOTHING, YOU FEEL OVERWHELMED AND POWERLESS. BUT WHEN YOU GET INVOLVED, YOU FEEL THE SENSE OF HOPE AND ACCOMPLISHMENT THAT COMES FROM KNOWING YOU ARE WORKING TO MAKE THINGS BETTER.”

- *Maya Angelou, as quoted by the National Breast Cancer Foundation, Inc.*

You can help to ensure that thousands of disadvantaged Idaho women have an equal opportunity to access potentially life-saving breast cancer screenings, by supporting efforts to acquire a new vehicle to keep the Women’s Mobile Health Clinic on the road for the years to come. *You* can help to fuel the local fight against breast cancer.

The mobile mammography program was first made possible through a generous start-up gift from the Saint Alphonsus Women's Healthcare Fund, a membership organization committed to advancing health awareness in our region. Longtime partnerships with the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, Susan G. Komen for the Cure-Boise, the National Breast Cancer Foundation, the Women's Healthcare Fund Secret Sisters program, and others have subsidized screening on behalf of thousands of individual patients, enabling Saint Al's to sustain the program for all women in need. Through these partnerships and careful stewardship of its resources, the mobile clinic has become largely self-sustaining, and has rarely appealed for direct charitable contributions. However, the Breast Care Center needs your help to raise the funding necessary to replace its long-serving mobile clinic with a new model ready to take on the challenge of caring for thousands of women over the next decade and beyond.

In 2011, there is not yet a cure for breast cancer. In 2011, there are also no excuses for why any woman should have to wait too long for a breast cancer screening, or to receive a breast cancer diagnosis after it is much too late. In honor of all southwestern Idaho residents whose lives have been personally, profoundly, and – all too often – permanently, impacted by breast cancer, proceeds from the 2011 Festival of Trees will be applied toward the purchase and outfitting of a new 40-foot medical specialty vehicle to serve as the next generation Women’s Mobile Health Clinic.

Support the 2011 Festival of Trees. Help us to tell women and their families throughout our region, “*We caught it in time.*”



A Lifetime Partner

Saint Alphonsus established the Breast Care Center in the 1980s, dedicated to women’s health and the earliest possible detection of breast cancer. The Breast Care Center has since achieved every formal accreditation within its field, earning the title of *Breast Imaging Center of Excellence* from the ACR and a reputation as the most accredited breast cancer screening resource in the state of Idaho. The Breast Care Center serves a volume of 13,000 patients annually between its original site located on the Saint Alphonsus campus in Boise, and a satellite program in Eagle, Idaho. The Breast Care Center partners with the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, Susan G. Komen for the Cure – Boise, the Saint Alphonsus Women’s Healthcare Fund, and other organizations to ensure access to mammograms and clinical breast examinations by low-income, uninsured, and underinsured patients.

In the early 1990s, the Breast Care Center introduced its accredited mobile mammography program to meet the needs of underserved women throughout an expansive rural service area. During the last reporting period, the mobile program served approximately 3,000 women ages 35 and older residing in 24 remote Idaho, Oregon, and Nevada counties.

In 2010, the Breast Care Center introduced a high-risk-patient program to support healthy patients presenting a high probability for hereditary breast cancer syndrome (and recent cancer survivors undergoing continued surveillance) through risk assessment tools, enhanced screening regimens, and guidance on prophylactic measures. This service augments the complimentary genetic counseling program that has been available in partnership with the Saint Alphonsus Cancer Care Center.

Also in 2010, Saint Alphonsus merged with three rural southwestern Idaho and eastern Oregon hospitals as the nonprofit Saint Alphonsus Health System, and has introduced a unified digital mammography program throughout the bi-state service area, inclusive of facility-based breast imaging center sites in Boise, Eagle, Nampa, and eastern Oregon, as well as the Women’s Mobile Health Clinic, which is available for thousands of rural women unable to travel to facility-based breast imaging centers.

For more information, please visit www.saintalphonsus.org/svc_breastcare.html.