

## **Diagnostic Test Tracking**

**Since my interpreting radiologist is already required to notify patients of their screening mammogram results, why must I, as the ordering physician, track these tests?**

The failure to have solid systems in place for the tracking of labs and diagnostics such as screening mammograms and annual pap smears has resulted in a bad outcome for many patients, often with large claims payouts.

Strict reliance upon lab or radiology notification systems is not an option in today's complex and busy medical care delivery system. The fact that radiologists are required to send mammography reports to patients does not exempt the ordering physician from test tracking and follow-up.

Increasingly common are breast cancer lawsuits based on the concept of "delayed diagnosis", (as early as three to four months), and in younger populations of women. In fact, delayed diagnosis now forms the basis of roughly 90% of all breast cancer-related lawsuits. Damages often include potential loss of life and loss of choice of breast-conserving therapy due to increased size of the mass. There is also the difficult-to-quantify pain and suffering associated with a delayed, traumatic diagnosis. Certainly no physician wants to put a patient through more trauma or lose her trust, nor does he or she want to end up in court defending a patient's care.

Along with radiologists, obstetrician-gynecologists are the specialists most frequently sued for "delay in diagnosis" of breast cancer. According to one study, "an almost equal amount of payments resulted from delivery-induced complications to newborns... and misdiagnosed breast cancer by obstetricians and gynecologists. Unfortunately, we can expect this trend to continue as more and more obstetricians become their patients' primary-care physicians, order screening & diagnostic mammograms and are expected to evaluate breast lumps.

If you're not tracking the screening mammograms you order, how do you know if your patients require further testing and follow-up by another medical specialist? The simple premise with all tests is that "if you ordered it, you own it" until you are assured the patient has been notified and the proper follow-up is in place.

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