

COVID-19 & Delayed Health Screenings

Submitted by Pam Dewey, Mammography Technologist at Memorial Medical Center

In late February 2020, we began hearing about possible closures or “shut-downs” of non-essential hospital services and even the short term closure of medical clinics. By March we were experiencing these closures and restrictions, nationwide. Though our country was only “shut down” for a three month period. It may have had a bigger impact than one would expect.

Staff at Memorial Medical Center (MMC) in Ashland and Hayward Area Memorial Hospital (HAMH) have been here through it all and have seen the devastation that a virus such as COVID-19 can have on a community. Along with fellow technologists, nurses, doctors and countless ancillary staff we have been educated, re-educated, took precautions, sanitized everything in sight countless times and worried. Worried how this would affect our communities.

It is time for us to think more about taking care of ourselves and our own health. It is estimated that by not having regular doctor visits and regular health screenings that cancer rates will soar in the next 10 years. "As Director of the National Cancer Institute, I am deeply concerned about the potential impacts of delayed diagnoses and deferred or modified treatment plans on cancer incidence and mortality," said Norman Sharpless, MD.

People did not receive general health care and screenings during the recent shut-down and that trend seems to be continuing, which is cause for concern. The medical community has a standard of care designed to better care for patient’s long term health. Medical screenings, as part of an annual or recommended scheduled exams are down. These exemptions from your personal health care can make a big impact on your long term health.

In an article recently published by Medscape and written by Roxanne Nelson, RN, BSN it was stated that there is predicted to be an excess of cancer deaths in the United States and United Kingdom due to patients not accessing healthcare services. The authors calculated that there will be 6,270 excess deaths among cancer patients one year from now in England and 33,890 excess deaths among cancer patients older than 40 years in the United States.

Annual mammograms, colorectal screening, cervical cancer screening and even some cancer treatments have been delayed while the world tried to figure out how to deal with the pandemic. It is now time to visit your doctor and return to your normal scheduled health care screenings.

Here at MMC and HAMH we want our community to feel safe and to resume their usual screening exams. Our staff is trained and sensitive to the needs of our patients. We provide communication about what safety precautions are in place and what you can expect when you

come to our facilities. Wearing a mask is required at all times and visitors are limited. Cleaning and sanitation procedures are guided by the recommendations and standards set by the CDC.

MMC and HAMH are accepting all patients for mammography screenings. We work closely with you to provide safe, prompt exams and results. We provide letters to our patients explaining results and provide patients primary care provider with a complete report of the results of your mammogram, which are read by a licensed Radiologist specializing in interpreting your mammogram. We work closely with your provider to attend to any breast health concerns or diagnostic mammography that is needed.

The American Cancer Society recommends that women with an average risk of breast cancer should undergo regular mammography screenings starting at age 45. Women between the ages of 40 and 44 years should have the opportunity to begin annual screening. Women ages 45 to 54 years should be screened annually. Women should continue screening mammography as long as their overall health is good and they have a life expectancy of 10 years or longer.

Schedule your next screening today.

Memorial Medical Center: 715-685-5415

Hayward Area Memorial Hospital: 715-934-4237