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STAND

Ebel: Seeing Pink – Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Joe Ebel, Guest Columnist Published 9:37 a.m. ET Oct. 4, 2017



(Photo: Submitted photo)

Every October we see a flood of pink to support National Breast Cancer Awareness month. Sometimes these displays aim to raise funds for breast cancer research and patient or survivor support, other times the pink displays are a subtle reminder to increase breast cancer awareness.

What can we do with these pink reminders of breast cancer? Simple things, like encouraging the women in our lives to talk with their doctors about getting mammograms, or sharing the important fact that screenings and early detection can result in successful treatment of breast cancer.

Every year, in Licking County, an average of 120 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer and 24 women will die due to breast cancer. Approximately 70 percent of these cancers will be identified in the early stages of the disease... but we can do better.

In recent years, women have been receiving mixed messages about when to start getting mammograms, and how often. The National Comprehensive Cancer Network recommends routine mammography for women starting at age 40, The American Cancer Society recommends starting at age 45, and the US Preventive Services Task Force recommends screening mammography every other year for women ages 50 through 74. They all agree that women should begin talking with their health care provider by age 40 about screening recommendations based on their cancer risk and the screening benefits and risks for their age, so that they can make an informed decision about screenings.

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The Affordable Care Act required insurers to cover breast cancer mammography screening with no deductibles or co-pays for women over age 40. This, along with the expansion of Medicaid, removed barriers to screening for many women in Ohio. There are still many women who are uninsured and in need of screening services. Fortunately, there are programs available to assist these women. In Ohio, the Breast and Cervical Cancer Project (BCCP) can provide mammogram and cervical screenings through local providers at no cost to income-eligible women. Locally, Licking County provides the Screening and Support Services for Breast Cancer (SASS) program that can further assist women who may not qualify for BCCP. SASS also offers a \$500 stipend to Licking County women who are diagnosed with breast cancer to help with cancer-related costs not covered by insurance, like wigs, prosthetics, child care, meals, and transportation.

These annual displays of pink have special meaning to the survivors and those with friends or family who have been diagnosed with breast cancer. For everyone else, the sea of pink in October should be a reminder of those 120 women in our county that will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year, their battle, and the memory of those whose lives will be claimed by this disease.

For information about the SASS program visit www.lcsass.org. For BCCP enrollment call (866) 418-4963.

Ebel is the Licking County Health commissioner

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