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Senate Minority Deputy Whip Demands HHS Remove all Support for Discredited USPSTF Mammography Recommendations

May 11, 2010 – Washington, DC – The American College of Radiology (ACR) applauds Sen. David Vitter (R-LA) for his recent letter to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius demanding that, in compliance with recently passed health care reform legislation, HHS immediately remove from all HHS sponsored web sites and materials any references to the [discredited and potentially deadly November 2009 U.S. Preventative Services Task Force mammography recommendations](#). Section 2713 of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act effectively requires the federal government to set aside the November 2009 USPSTF recommendations related to breast cancer and mammography.

Since the onset of regular mammography screening in 1990, the mortality rate from breast cancer, which had been unchanged for the preceding 50 years, has decreased by 30 percent. Ignoring direct scientific evidence from large clinical trials, the USPSTF based recommendations to greatly reduce breast cancer screening on conflicting computer models and the unsupported and discredited idea that the parameters of mammography screening change abruptly at age 50. There are no scientific data to support this premise.

“The fact that these recommendations are still being presented to the general public as ‘current’ is only serving to further confuse women on this critical issue. The recommendations were ill-conceived from the start – developed via a process without transparency, without input from those with experience and expertise in the field, and without due regard for the thousands of lives that could be impacted by the recommendation. They represent a step backward in our fight against a horrible disease and the taxpayers’ dollar must not be spent in further promotion of them,” wrote Sen. Vitter.

The USPSTF is a panel funded and staffed by the HHS Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). The Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008 (MIPPA) gave the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services the authority to consider USPSTF recommendations in Medicare coverage determinations. A recent [Avon Foundation for Women survey](#) reported that states are making changes to their coverage for mammography based on the mistaken USPSTF recommendations and even denying women coverage for mammograms. California, particularly, [has already cut coverage of mammography](#) for low income women.

“The ACR strongly supports Sen. Vitter’s request. These USPSTF recommendations run counter to the expert guidance of the American Cancer Society, [American College of Radiology \(ACR\)](#) and [Society of Breast Imaging](#) and have undoubtedly confused many women to the point that they have refused needed care. Breast cancer screening policy decisions based on faulty recommendations may result in the [unnecessary loss of thousands of lives](#),” said James H. Thrall, MD, FACR, chair of the ACR Board of chancellors.

The federally funded and staffed USPSTF includes representatives from major health insurers, but *not* a single radiologist, oncologist, breast surgeon, or any other clinician with demonstrated expertise in breast cancer diagnosis or treatment.

“The USPSTF process needs to be fundamentally changed to ensure that those most knowledgeable in the subject matter have significant input regarding recommendations of the USPSTF. “Allowing a small group of people, who may or may not have any expertise in the field on which they are making recommendations, to publish periodic recommendations in a medical journal or via web posting, and have those serve as health coverage policy is unacceptable and potentially dangerous. I think these particular USPSTF recommendations have been shown to be an example of how health care policy should not be done moving forward,” said ACR Chair Thrall.

[Click here](#) to read Sen. Vitter’s letter to HHS.

For more information or to arrange an interview with an ACR spokesperson, please contact ACR Director of Public Affairs Shawn Farley at 703-648-8936 or sfarley@acr-arrs.org.

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