



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Ladies First Promotes Screening During Breast Cancer Awareness Month

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BURLINGTON – Barbara MacGregor has insisted on getting screened for breast cancer for more than 10 years as a member of the Ladies First program, so when her mammography and biopsy showed signs of cancer in January 2010, she knew it had been detected early.

She also knew that early detection of breast cancer significantly increases her chances for effective treatment and survival.

“My mother had breast cancer, so I knew I should get screened. I think some women are afraid to get screened, but I wanted to know,” said MacGregor, of Barre Town. “I’ve always been proactive, and I consider myself to be a real success story in a lot of ways.”

The Vermont Department of Health created Ladies First in 1995 to improve access to breast and cervical cancer screening and diagnosis for women. October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Ladies First, which is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has expanded over the years and now includes mammograms, Pap tests, screenings for cholesterol, blood pressure and diabetes, tobacco cessation and other services, including transportation to medical appointments.

The Ladies First program staff is continually working on new strategies to reach the one out of eight Vermont women who are eligible for Ladies First, but are not taking advantage of the free services.

“Nearly a third of the 985 Pap tests through Ladies First in 2008 were provided for women who are rarely or never screened,” said Julie Wasserman, director of Ladies First. “Our goal each year is to increase awareness and convince more Vermont women that getting screened saves lives.”

Ladies First has served more than 14,000 women since 2000. A Vermont woman living in a two-person household can earn up to \$36,425 a year and receive free services. Vermont women over age 40, or younger women with abnormal breast or cervical test results, can qualify for the program.

“One of our challenges is that under-insured and uninsured women often don’t get screened because they are concerned about how they will pay for needed services. This program was established specifically for those women,” said Annmarie Plant-DeHayes, case manager for the Ladies First program.

Gretchen Ingraham, of Bennington said the Ladies First program proved to be invaluable for her when she was diagnosed with cervical cancer and had no health insurance. Ladies First assists women in getting insurance coverage for treatment through a special program.

“I haven’t had any bills to work through, which takes away a lot of stress. I was looking at \$50,000 in bills – if not more,” said Ingraham, whose cancer has shown no signs of returning for more than a year. “Without the program, I couldn’t have even gone in for the initial consultation.”

For more information on the Ladies First program, call Kate at 1-800-508-2222 or visit www.LadiesFirstVt.org. Deaf and hard-of-hearing women can use the Vermont Relay Service 711 and then give the number 1-800-508-2222.

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