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WHY BREAST DENSITY MATTERS

MOST WOMEN DON'T KNOW WHAT THEIR BREAST DENSITY STATUS IS AND DON'T UNDERSTAND THE POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF HAVING DENSE BREASTS

My Story...

I live in France and in March 2016, just after my 50th birthday, I was invited for my first ever mammogram. The radiologist announced it was 'normal'; no abnormalities, but a decision was made to carry out an ultrasound as there was an area of dense tissue (dense tissue can obscure cancers). A few moments later, the ultrasound showed an area of concern that was not seen on mammography. The following week a biopsy confirmed a small 8-mm invasive cancerous tumour.

After a lumpectomy to remove the tumour, I received six weeks of radiotherapy. My tumour was detected early. I did not need a mastectomy, reconstructive surgery or chemotherapy.

The French breast screening programme protocol, offering additional ultrasound screening on dense breast tissue contributed to my positive health outcome. In the UK, without a doubt, in my case, my cancer would have been left undetected based on existing national breast screening guidelines.

Breast Density Matters UK

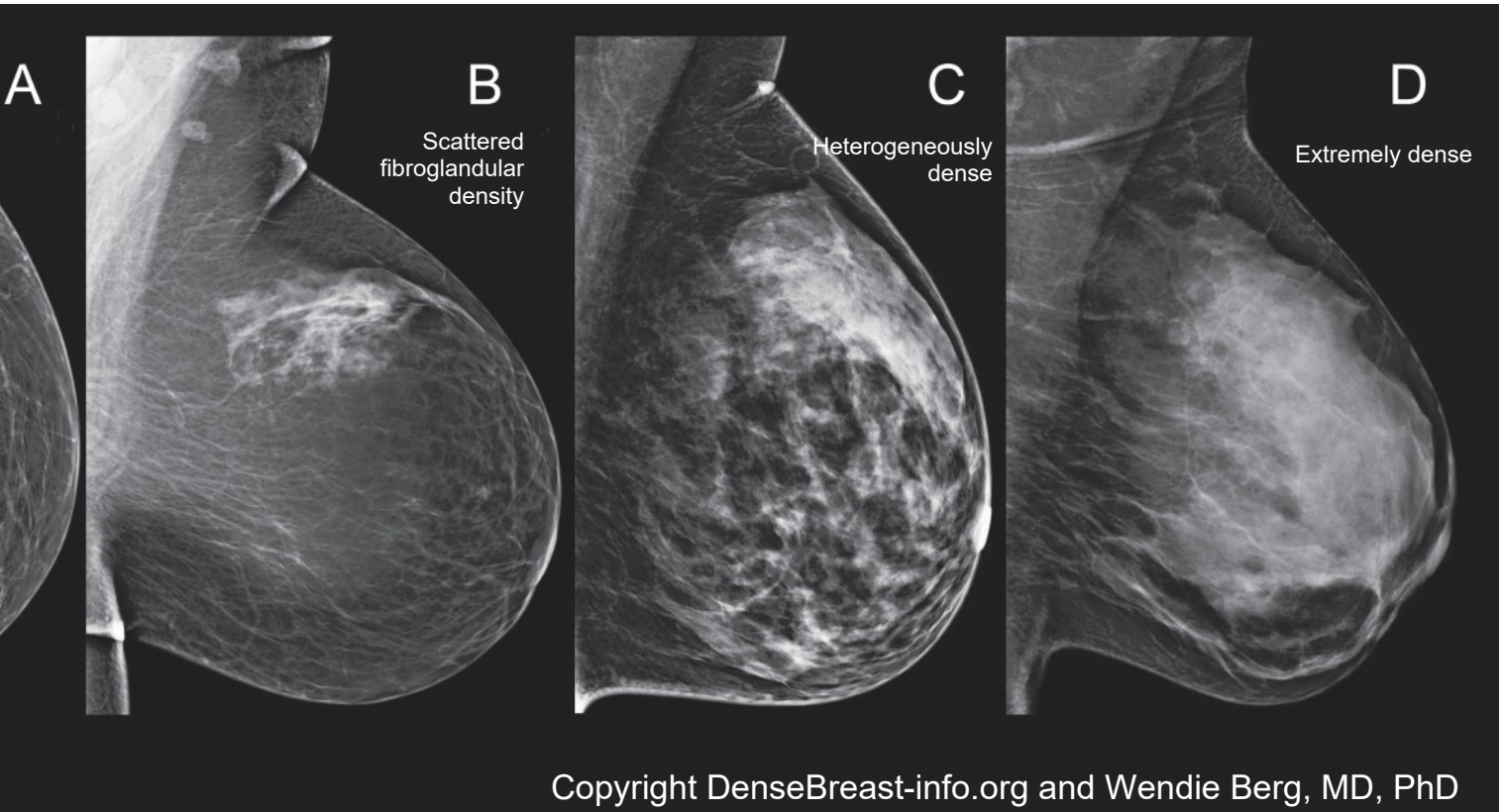
Two days after my operation, I formed Breast Density Matters UK, a patient advocacy group with the aim to educate women about the implications of dense breasts.

I had experienced a positive outcome in France and I was compelled to raise awareness for women in the UK. Equipped with breast density information,

women can make informed decisions about their breast health, taking into account family history and lifestyle, and discuss their options with medical experts to decide if further screening is appropriate (e.g., MRI if high risk, or ultrasound if only dense).

Having dense breasts both increases the likelihood of developing cancer and of having cancer being missed by mammography

Mammography is not as effective in dense breasts. In France and Austria, based on national screening guidelines, if a woman has dense breast tissue (category C/D, see Fig.2), further screening is offered; mammography is coupled with ultrasound.



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More information visit:

www.densebreast-info.org

In the United States of America, 37 states have now passed legislation. Following a mammogram, women receive some level of notification about breast density and its associated risks.

What is Dense Breast Tissue?

All breasts contain glands, fibrous tissue, and fat. Dense tissue is made of glands and fibrous tissue. Dense breasts are normal but have relatively more glandular/fibrous tissue than fatty breasts.

As seen in Fig.1, dense breast tissue appears white as does a cancerous tumour; it is like looking for a ball of cotton in a snowstorm; the denser the tissue, the whiter the mammogram. This matters because as density increases, the ability of a mammogram to show cancer decreases.

DENSE BREAST FACTS

1. Breast density is determined through a woman's mammogram and described as one of four categories (see figure 2 above): (A) Fatty; (B) Scattered fibroglandular density; (C) Heterogeneously dense; or (D) Extremely dense. Breasts which are (C) Heterogeneously dense; or (D) Extremely dense are considered "dense breasts."

2. Dense breasts are normal. 40% of women age 40 and over have dense breasts.

- 3. Although normal, dense breast tissue is a risk factor for developing breast cancer and the denser the breast, the greater the risk.
- 4. Mammography remains the standard screening test for breast cancer and is proven to reduce deaths due to breast cancer. However, in dense breasts, cancers can be hidden on mammography and may go undetected until they are larger and more likely to have spread.
- 5. Other screening tests, such as ultrasound or MRI, when added to mammography, substantially increase the detection of early stage breast cancer in women with dense breasts.

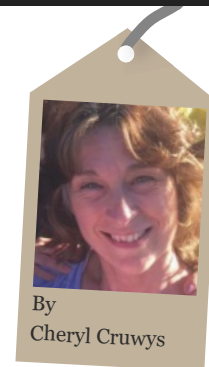
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"NHS England to recognize the need & provide Breast Density Education for women."

We regularly meet with MPs at Westminster and breast density is now a topic of discussion in cancer debates in the House of Commons.



Cheryl is the Founder of Breast Density Matters UK. Their mission is to raise awareness and educate about the implications of dense breast tissue.

Cheryl is also the European Education Coordinator for DenseBreast-info and a member of the Patient Advisory Group of the European Society of Radiology

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