If you ask the breast imagers at Fairfax Radiological Consultants (FRC) what keeps them awake at night, most will admit to losing sleep after reading a particularly challenging mammogram for a woman with dense breasts. “Those cases”, says Dr. Lily Chu Sicard, one of FRC’s dedicated breast radiologists, “where you look at images that are just white and you know anything could be hiding in there.” In March 2012, FRC took a major step in overcoming some of the detection challenges by installing a Hologic® Selenia® Dimensions® 3D mammography (breast tomosynthesis) system in their Breast Diagnostic Center in Fairfax, VA. They have since installed Hologic’s tomosynthesis systems in three of their other locations in the metropolitan Washington D.C. / northern Virginia area and plan to make the technology available in additional centers.
MEETING A CLINICAL NEED AND SUPPORTING A MANDATE

Although the breast imagers at FRC find 3D mammography beneficial for all patients, the biggest impact they have seen is in women with heterogeneously dense or very dense breasts. “With tomosynthesis,” says Dr. Victoria Davis, a breast imaging specialist with FRC, “we’re able to view the breast in thin slices, distinguishing between what is simply innocent, overlapping structures and what is a true mass or an architectural distortion. Even in some women with scattered fibroglandular densities, we’ve seen spiculations show up on the 3D images that we didn’t see on the traditional 2D images.”

The decision to transition to 3D mammography came at a good time for FRC. In July 2012, the state of Virginia enacted a law mandating the inclusion of breast density information in the letter sent to women after their mammogram, with the warning that dense tissue “can hide cancer or other abnormalities.” “Now,” says Dr. Sicard, “when women who get these letters ask us what else they can do to improve their breast cancer screening, we have something effective to offer them—3D mammography. This exam is a natural extension of their annual mammogram, so it is an easy way to provide an extra level of vigilance.”

A NEW LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE

Dr. Elise Berman, Medical Director of the Breast Imaging Section for FRC, fully appreciates the benefit 3D mammography brings in finding small cancers not seen on 2D images, but she is equally excited about the confidence it gives readers to reduce unnecessary recalls. Dr. Berman says, “Getting that phone call telling you that you need to come back for additional evaluations is very anxiety-provoking. If we can decrease the number of women who have to come back, then we’ve provided a wonderful service for our patients.”

SPREADING THE WORD

FRC offers 3D mammography to all patients and charges a small additional fee to cover the 3D portion of the exam. FRC has done some advertising, but has found word of mouth to be their most effective marketing tool. According to Dr. Sicard, “Being in the metropolitan D.C. area, our patient population is very savvy and stays current on new technologies. If we don’t offer the latest technologies, patients will find a practice that does.”

The staff at FRC advise their family and friends to have a 3D mammogram and, when it comes time for their own mammograms, they all ask for 3D. “When you have people, especially technologists, who work with something every day, and they all want it for themselves, that’s really a testimony to the strength of the technology,” concludes Dr. Sicard.

For more information, visit breasttomo.com

“ONE BENEFIT OF 3D MAMMOGRAPHY, IS BEING CONFIDENT THAT WHEN YOU CALL SOMEONE BACK, EVEN FOR A VERY SUBTLE FINDING, THERE’S REALLY GOING TO BE SOMETHING THERE. AND WHEN YOU CONFIRM IT, YOU THINK, THANK GOODNESS THE PATIENT GOT A MAMMOGRAM THIS YEAR. AND THANK GOODNESS SHE GOT THE 3D IMAGES.”

DR. LILY CHU SICARD, BREAST RADIOLOGIST, FAIRFAX RADIOLOGICAL CONSULTANTS