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Minister Ab Klink gives go-ahead for Philips national digital breast cancer screening program

Significantly more cases of breast cancer detected thanks to digitization of national breast cancer screening

Bilthoven, the Netherlands - Today, Minister Klink of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport will give the RIVM¹ the go-ahead for a new national digital mammography program executed by Philips. Each year, mammograms are performed on around 900,000 women as part of the national breast cancer screening program. It will soon be possible to receive and transport the images made in digital form. Digitization improves the quality of the images, making it easier to detect any abnormalities. "Initial results indicate a significant increase in the number of cases of breast cancer being detected," says Prof. Dr. Ard den Heeten, a radiologist involved in the national digitization drive.

By the summer of 2009, half of all the equipment in the Netherlands will be digital. Philips is the principal contractor for this groundbreaking digitization project. DigiBOB, as the national digitization drive has been dubbed, is the largest and most complex digitization operation ever to have taken place within the Dutch healthcare system. It is a welcome example of the way in which healthcare can be simplified and made more efficient in the interests of both the patient/customer and the care provider.

Women undergoing screening will not notice any difference initially, as the mammograms are performed in exactly the same way. However, the RIVM predicts that this technique will make it possible to detect breast cancer at an earlier stage. The new system also means that all the information will be available to radiologists in digital form, enabling them to work more efficiently. Moreover, there will be no need to take new X-rays in cases where a woman moves to a new hospital or transfers to a different specialist. The diagnosis can be reached sooner and with greater accuracy, thereby increasing the patient's chances of recovery. And the laboratory technician will be able to see at a glance whether a clear image has been obtained.

¹ RIVM = National Institute for Public Health and the Environment

In the last four years, the regional screening organizations and the RIVM's CBO² have formed a national network which all 65 screening centers, 19 administrative units and 19 assessment units will join in the course of this coming year.

The aim is to form a single national system, a single central database for all mammograms, a paperless, uniform procedure and a safe, quick fiber optic network.

Every year, one million women aged between 50 and 75 are invited to participate in the breast cancer-screening program, the purpose of which is to detect breast cancer at an early stage. As a result of the screening program, 750 less women die from breast cancer each year.

² CBO = Dutch Institute for Healthcare Improvement