



DR. DIMITRY KIM

Breast Cancer Awareness Month: What women should know

By MELISSA BERMAN
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■ Q: Tell me about yourself.

Kim: I am a board-certified general surgeon and chief of general surgery at Episcopal Health Services. My areas of focus include breast cancer surgery, minimally invasive surgery, hernias, gallbladder surgery and soft-tissue tumors. I also serve as the program director for the General Surgery residency program at St. John's Episcopal Hospital and am an adjunct professor of surgery at Touro College of Osteopathic Medicine. I am passionate about educating patients and future physicians.

■ Q: Why is early detection so important for women?

Kim: Breast Cancer Awareness Month is an opportunity to educate women about breast health, screening and recognizing changes in their breasts. Early detection is important because breast can-

cer is generally easier to treat when it is found before it has spread. Regular screening can sometimes detect cancer before a person notices any symptoms.

■ Q: At what age should women begin getting regular mammograms?

Kim: For women at average risk, recommendations vary somewhat by organization. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends mammograms every two years from ages 40 through 74. Other organizations recommend annual screening for some age groups. Women with a strong family history, certain genetic mutations or other high-risk factors may need to begin earlier and may need additional screening, such as a breast MRI. The best schedule should be discussed with a health care provider. EHS recommends annual mammograms beginning at age 40 and offers digital and 3D mammography.

■ Q: What warning signs or symp-

toms of breast cancer should women not ignore?

Kim: Warning signs can include a new lump in the breast or underarm, thickening or swelling, a change in the size or shape of the breast, dimpling or other skin changes, nipple inversion, unusual nipple discharge — especially bloody discharge — or persistent breast or nipple changes. Most breast changes are not cancer, but any new or unexplained change should be evaluated by a health care professional.

■ Q: How have advances in breast cancer screening, diagnosis and treatment improved outcomes?

Kim: There have been major improvements. Advances in mammography and imaging can help detect cancers earlier, while genetic and molecular testing allows doctors to better understand the characteristics of an individual tumor. Treatments have also become more personalized, including targeted therapies, hormone therapies, immunotherapy for certain cancers, improved radiation techniques and more individualized surgery. EHS offers breast cancer patients access to surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, hormonal therapy and immunotherapy, depending on the cancer and individual treatment plan.

■ Q: What factors can increase a person's risk of developing breast cancer?



Courtesy Episcopal Health Services

Dr. Dimitry Kim, general surgeon, Episcopal Health Services.

Kim: Risk generally increases with age. Other factors include a personal or family history of breast or ovarian cancer, inherited genetic variants such as BRCA1 and BRCA2, dense breasts, previous chest radiation at a young age, certain reproductive and hormonal factors, alcohol consumption, obesity after menopause and physical inactivity. Having a risk factor does not mean someone will develop breast cancer, and many people diagnosed with breast cancer do not have a strong family history.

■ Q: Anything else to add?

Kim: Don't let fear or inconvenience keep you from getting checked. Most abnormal mammo-

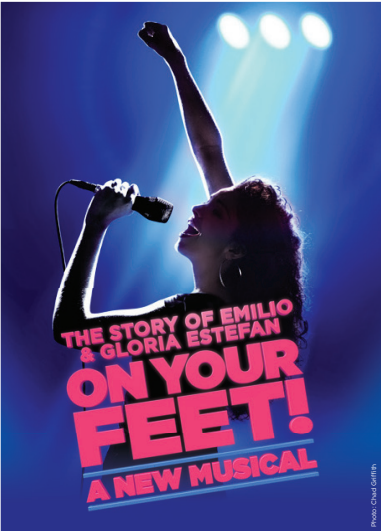
gram results and breast changes do not turn out to be cancer, but if cancer is present, finding it earlier can provide more treatment options and improve the chances of successful treatment. If you're due for screening, schedule it. If you notice a new or concerning breast change, contact your health care provider rather than waiting for your next routine mammogram.

EHS offers mammography at the Margaret O. Carpenter Women's Health Center and St. John's Episcopal Hospital. A breast health navigator is available at 718-869-5886 to help patients with appointments, testing and care planning.

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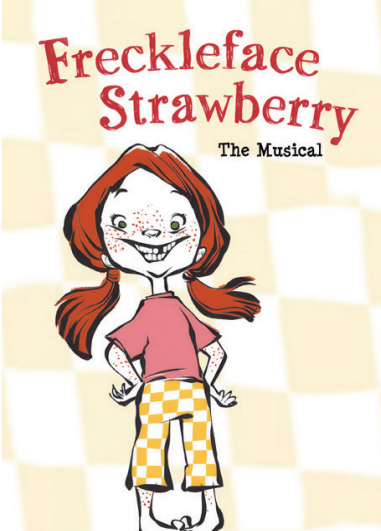


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