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BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH IS A GOOD TIME TO TAKE STOCK OF HEALTHY HABITS

MORGANTOWN, WV (OCTOBER 6, 2017) – The trees outside might be changing to hues of red, orange and yellow, but many people know that October is the time to “Think Pink” in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

Each year in the U.S., more than 200,000 women get breast cancer and more than 40,000 women die from the disease, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (cdc.gov). Breast cancer is the most common type of cancer to strike women in West Virginia. Men also can get breast cancer, but less than 1 percent of breast cancers occur in men. Women also are more likely to be diagnosed with it if they are 50 years old or older; however, about 10 percent of new cases of breast cancer occur in American women younger than 45 years old.

Regular mammograms can lower the risk of dying from breast cancer, according to the CDC. The United States Preventive Services Task Force recommends that average-risk women who are 50 to 74 years old have screening mammograms every two years. Average-risk women who are 40 to 49 years old should talk to their doctor about when to start and how often to get a screening mammogram.

Although breast cancer usually strikes women who are 50 years old and older, younger women can get the disease too. Some factors that contribute to women getting breast cancer at a young age include close relatives who were diagnosed with breast or ovarian cancer when they were younger than 45, especially if more than one relative was diagnosed or if a male relative had breast cancer. Chances also increase for women with certain breast cancer genes, such as BRCA1 and BRCA2, or who have close relatives with these genes.

Other risk factors include Ashkenazi Jewish heritage and also women who were treated with radiation therapy to the breast or chest during childhood or early adulthood; previous breast cancers or breast health problems; and dense breasts.

In addition to prevention and early detection measures, women should be on the lookout for symptoms of breast cancer. These include a new lump in the breast or armpit; thickening or swelling of part of the breast; irritation or dimpling of the breast skin; redness or flaky skin in the nipple area or breast; pulling in of the nipple or pain in the nipple area; nipple discharge.
other than breast milk, including blood; any change in the size or shape of the breast; and pain in any area of the breast.

The Monongalia County Health Department (MCHD) has services that can help women detect cancer early, including annual clinical breast exams for women 21 to 65 years old. MCHD also can refer women who qualify through the West Virginia Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening Program (WVBCCSP) for mammograms at Betty Puskar Breast Care Center at the WVU Cancer Institute or Mon Health Medical Center, both in Morgantown.

During Breast Cancer Awareness Month, take stock of your breast health habits and if needed, make an appointment with a health care provider or the Clinical Services program at MCHD (monchd.org) by calling 304-598-5119.