The Best-Kept Secret
By Nancy M Cappello, Ph.D.

My Story
On February 3, 2004, I was diagnosed with stage 3c breast cancer within weeks of a ‘normal’ mammogram. What I have learned since my diagnosis is that I have dense breast tissue and wasn’t aware of its significance as:

1) Mammography misses every other cancer in dense breasts as cancer appears white on a mammogram and dense tissue is white—thus there is no contrast to detect the cancer and

2) the mammography report that is written by the radiologist to the referring physician, which has detailed information about a woman’s breasts, is seldom shared with the patient.

Just seven weeks prior to my late stage cancer diagnosis, I had my 11th yearly mammogram & the ‘happy gram’ report stated that my mammogram was ‘normal.’ At a subsequent annual exam, my doctor felt a ridge in my breast and ordered a mammogram. The mammogram revealed ‘nothing’ but that same day the ultrasound detected a quarter-size lesion. The pathology report revealed advanced cancer metastasized to 13 lymph nodes.

What happened to Early Detection?
Because cancer was detected at such an advanced stage, I endured an aggressive treatment consisting of chemotherapy, radiation, numerous surgeries & hormone therapy. Since my diagnosis, I am compelled to expose the BEST-KEPT SECRET about dense breast tissue and its significance as mammography is limited by dense tissue & dense breast tissue is a predictor of breast cancer risk.

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‘To withhold a woman’s breast tissue composition from her is denying her the right to make an informed decision about her breast health.’

There are two **BIRADS** (Breast Imaging Reporting and Data System) scales that are used by radiologists to standardize mammography reporting. The following ACR BIRADS® 5th Edition categorizes breast Density.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>Incomplete Need Additional Imaging Evaluation and/or Prior Mammograms for comparison</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Benign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Probably Benign</td>
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| 4A,B,C | A: Low suspicion for malignancy  
B: Moderate suspicion for malignancy  
C: High suspicion for malignancy |
| 5 | Highly Suggestive of Malignancy                                                  |
| 6 | Known biopsy—Proven Malignancy                                                   |

**Discuss with your doctor your breast tissue composition. Most likely the mammography report that you receive will not contain this information.**

The other **BIRADS** scale categorizes the findings that are **seen** on the mammogram. Most mammography reports reference this **BIRADS** scale.

A woman with dense breast tissue **CANNOT** rely solely on the above **BIRADS** scale to determine findings of breast cancer.