

Company honing system to assess breast density

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Technology expected to be viable in 18 months

Densitas Inc. of Halifax will introduce technology in about 18 months that enhances the effectiveness of mammograms by assessing breast density.

The development comes at a time when lawmakers in Canada and the United States are moving to ensure breast density assessments are offered with mammograms in the fight against cancer.

“The technology is receiving a great deal of interest, especially from the perspective of marketing opportunities,” developer Mohamed Abdoell, an associate professor with the diagnostic radiology department at Dalhousie University in Halifax, said Monday.

Abdoell is the founder of Densitas and also an affiliated scientist with the Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre.

The venture is backed by Michael Lee, vice-president of venture investments with Rogers Ventures, and Brian Lowe, co-founder of the First Angel Network Association.

After about a year of research and development, the critical density assessment technology is ready for commercialization, with final testing and validation of the system soon to be underway, Abdoell said.

Legislation in Canada requiring breast density alerts with mammograms is under review, he said.

In the United States, breast density alerts are required in Connecticut, New York, Texas, Virginia and California, with legislation pending in 10 other states.

These legislative developments add to the commercial viability of the Densitas approach to assessing breast density, said Abdoell.

The system is not a diagnostic device on its own but is rather an adjunctive technology that works with existing digital mammogram systems.

Abdoell said the approach helps radiologists provide a breast density alert quickly and economically when it is required, as an alternative to the time-consuming manual assessments regularly conducted.

Technology that advances the effectiveness of mammograms would be especially welcomed in Nova Scotia, where breast cancer rates are the highest in Canada, said Barbara Thompson, executive director of Breast Cancer Action Nova Scotia.

Higher than average breast density can present an increased cancer risk and also hamper the effectiveness of mammograms, which are X-rays of the breast.

“The implications of breast density is certainly a factor for all women to consider,” said Thompson.

She said her organization works increasingly with younger women, and with more black women, who would have benefited from early detection related to breast density.

The relevance of breast density in the fight against breast cancer was recently in the spotlight with research by Dr. Deborah Rhodes at the Mayo Clinic that led to the development of a dual-sensor scanner, said Thompson.

“Concern about the implications of breast density as a risk factor, and as an impediment to an effective mammogram, was behind the development of this technology.”

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By **BILL POWER** Business Reporter

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