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# Improving the Mammography Experience: Bella Blankets® Help Eliminate Skin Tears

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## **Painful skin tears do happen**

Although mammographers take the utmost care when positioning patients for their mammogram, some women encounter skin tears under their breasts. A woman may have a skin tear due to aging “thin skin,” or simply because the breast sticks to the receptor plate and she pulls away too quickly after the compression paddle is released. Skin tears may be noticed immediately, or once the woman has gone home. In either case, skin tears may result in an unfavorable patient experience.

A woman may be more likely to have a skin tear if she is elderly with thin, dry, sensitive skin that bruises easily; is on certain medications, such as steroids; has a skin rash or yeast infection under the breast; or has scarring from breast reduction surgery. Women’s skin can stick to the receptor plate and result in a skin tear if they are nervous about having a mammogram, feeling sweaty from a hot flash, or have large breasts with inflammation in the inframammary fold.

## **Why are skin tears so unpleasant?**

First of all, skin tears are painful, and can feel like a paper cut. They may bleed or ooze. Sometimes there’s a tingling or burning sensation such as one might experience with an abrasion. In addition, the location makes it difficult to care for the wound – which can be several inches long – and the patient may have difficulty wearing a bra. What’s more, there is the potential for a secondary infection. Many women who experience a skin tear may become reluctant to have another mammogram due to fear of another tear, or may avoid mammograms altogether and miss an opportunity for early detection of breast cancer.

Sadly, some women who discover a skin tear after they’ve gone home then call the imaging center to report the tear do not receive a caring or comforting response. In fact, one can find numerous postings on public forums and message boards from women who have experienced a skin tear during mammography. Some of their stories are quite profound.

**“ I acquired a skin tear during my mammogram today...** I soon will be 60 and have had mammograms beginning in my early 20’s. The masses were always benign, but they always kept a close eye on me. If anything, I hugged closer as I pleaded with the technician that my skin was stuck and tearing and she ignored me. I guess I could be partly at fault. I worked all night. Showered when I arrived home. Dried off, but thought, “why wear a bra, I will be just taking it off.” I did not realize that my pendulous breasts had trapped moisture that may have not occurred had I worn that bra. My skin stuck. She pulled. Despite my pleas, she ignored me and it tore. Surgery, with no anesthesia!

She said, “Oh, yes that did tear. I will be more careful on the other side. And I will mark it on your record for next time.” Next time??? There will be no next time! I have had cancer and a stem cell transplant which were a cake-walk compared to this shearing pain. ”

*~ Deborah G., Patient & RN – Supervisor, PA*

## What does it mean for the provider or imaging facility?

Certainly, if the skin tear is discovered at the time of the mammogram, the technologist or other healthcare provider must tend to the wound. The tear will need to be documented in an incident or other report and/or in the patient's chart. In general, the following steps need to be taken when a skin tear occurs:<sup>1</sup>

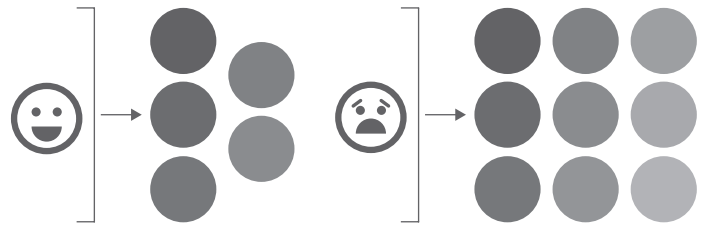
- Assess the patient and determine what care is needed
- Control any bleeding, clean the wound, and apply appropriate dressings according to local policy
- Discuss the wound with the patient
- If the tear is severe, refer patient to appropriate healthcare provider/facility for immediate care and/or follow-up
- Complete incident report or other documentation

In addition to the aforementioned steps, there may be other repercussions when a skin tear occurs. For example, a patient who has experienced a skin tear may be more anxious and tense during their next mammogram because they fear another tear. This can make the patient more difficult to position. Similarly, if a tear is present at the time of the next mammogram, it can make positioning more difficult.

## Impact on Patient Satisfaction

Of particular note is the impact on patient satisfaction and patient satisfaction scores, and the possibility that the patient will either forego having additional mammograms or will go to another facility. Furthermore, they may tell family and friends about their experience, expanding the circle of negativity. It's been estimated that 30% of consumers share their own healthcare experiences via social media and online ratings and review sites.<sup>2</sup> **In addition, satisfied patients**

**tend to share their positive experience with five others, on average, while dissatisfied patients complain to nine or more other people.<sup>3</sup>**



It has also been estimated that 33% of consumers read reviews for healthcare professionals and 68% of consumers said positive reviews made them more likely to use a business while reading negative reviews makes 40% of consumers not want to use a local business.<sup>4</sup>

The impact of a negative – or positive – experience can be immense. The cost of acquiring a new patient is anywhere from 5 to 25 times more expensive than retaining an existing one.<sup>5</sup> While attracting new patients is important, building and maintaining patient loyalty is critically important for recurring services such as mammography. Because the cost of obtaining a patient is high, losing a patient is a substantial loss of investment. For each new patient, a patient record must be established, insurance/payment information gathered, etc.

Of course, this is in addition to the direct lost revenue if the patient does not return to the facility for future breast cancer screening. Based on average mammography reimbursements and American Cancer Society breast cancer screening guidelines, the lifetime revenue from just one patient can be \$3,000 or more considering basic mammograms alone.<sup>6</sup> Add to that the potential revenue from ultrasound or other imaging for dense breasts, plus diagnostic procedures such as biopsies, and the amounts can be considerably higher.

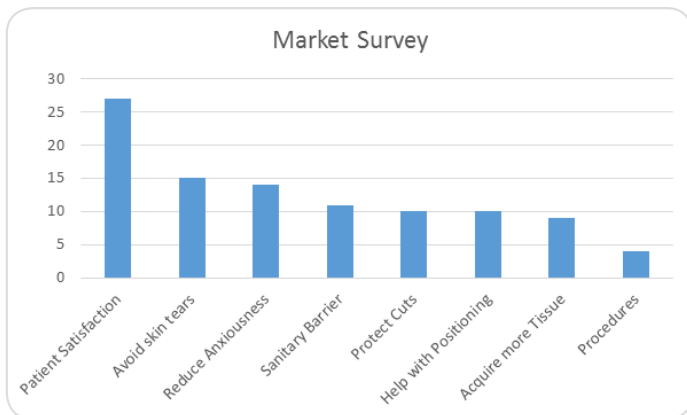
Patient experience and patient satisfaction scores can be enhanced when healthcare workers take pride in their work and demonstrate compassion. In a study of 269 acute care hospitals, compassion practices – a measure of the extent to which a hospital rewards compassionate acts and compassionately supports its employees – were shown to significantly and positively be associated with hospital ratings and a patient's likelihood to recommend the facility.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, if the patient has shared her skin tear experience with other patients who then go elsewhere, the lost revenue resulting from one skin tear could be in the tens of thousands of dollars. The risk is just too high, especially when an easy solution is available.

## Bella Blankets® receptor plate covers reduce likelihood of skin tears

One easy and effective way to help minimize the occurrence of skin tears is to use a receptor plate cover to prevent the breast from sticking to the receptor plate. In fact, some customers have shared that when using Bella Blankets, they have mostly eliminated skin tears.

According to a recent market survey, avoiding skin tears was the second most common reason cited by both freestanding imaging centers and hospitals for using a receptor plate cover.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, 56% of respondents said they use receptor plate covers to improve patient satisfaction, reduce anxiousness or avoid skin tears.



Beekley Medical Market Survey, December 2017

**Bella Blankets** protective coverlets increase tissue acquisition, immobilize hard to position breasts, prevent breasts from sticking to receptor plate, help shield cuts or infections in the inframammary fold, and act as a sanitary barrier. Constructed from a textured material and thin by design, Bella Blankets allow technologists to position

patients as close to the chest wall as possible.

New Vertical Channel Technology™ allows air to push out and release upon application, reducing air bubbles. Easy-lift PIK-UP™ tab allows for easy removal without leaving residue.



## What customers have said about their ability to reduce skin tears using Bella Blankets®:

“Bella Blankets work especially well with our larger patients, especially those with yeast infections or those whose inframammary creases tear easily. I have had multiple patients I have used this for who had skins tears in the past. When using the Bella Blanket, patient’s skin have not torn. This is a huge patient satisfier, so much so that they request me as their technologist for future exams.”

~ Mammography Supervisor, Mequon, WI

“I do think Bella Blankets make a difference for patient comfort [and] it eliminates IMF tears when the patient is pulling away from the machine.”

~ Mammography Supervisor, Bemidji, MN

“We have a lot of patients who are heavier and have sores under their breasts and Bella Blankets really help those patients from tearing those areas open even more.”

~ Mammography Technologist, Crookston, MN

“It makes for a more comfortable exam because the patient doesn’t stick to the machine which helps lessen the chances of an IMF tear. Getting the patient to work with you is the best way to improve getting all the tissue. Bella Blankets is a way to say to the patient, ‘I am doing the most I can for you, now you work with me and we will get a great exam.’ Patients love the fact that they do not stick to the machine. I had a patient who was very concerned about the discomfort of a mammogram and the fact that she had sensitive breasts. She watched as I put the Bella Blanket on the machine and explained why I was doing it. She appreciated the fact that I was trying to make the exam as comfortable as possible for her. She liked not sticking to the machine after the image was done and felt that it helped. I think it helped her relax which allowed for a good exam. I truly believe the less sticking to the machine the better and we have a large population of well-endowed women. Skin tears happen easily where the sun never shines, so however we can help, I think we should.”

~ Lead Technologist, Plymouth, NH

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