

PATIENT & COMMUNITY ADVOCATE AWARD: *Amy Patel, MD*

Improving Access to Mammography Screenings

By Sonia Coleman



Hundreds of thousands of Missouri women now have better access to the breast imaging they need, due to expanded mammography

legislation passed in 2018 and 2020.

Championing these patient advocacy efforts has been **Amy Patel, MD**, medical director of the Breast Care Center at Liberty Hospital and assistant professor of radiology at the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Medicine. She is the recipient of the KCMS 2021 Patient & Community Advocate Award.

“Missouri has one of the highest rates of breast cancer deaths, particularly for women who are Black or Hispanic,” she said. “I’m originally from rural northwest Missouri, so I feel quite a calling to improve care here.”

Dr. Patel remembers growing up in Chillicothe, Mo., where there was a paucity of women physicians and no physicians of color. From a very early age, she wanted to make a difference in closing the gap in health care disparities.

“Breast imaging aligned with my passion for women’s health and closing the gap for inequities. Now, what do we do to fix these inequities and provide more access to care?” she said.

Dr. Patel originally became involved in patient advocacy and political affairs through the American College of Radiology (ACR), prior to completing her residency at the University of Kansas School of Medicine Wichita campus and a breast imaging fellowship at Washington Univer-



Dr. Patel, right, with state Sen. Lauren Arthur.

sity in St. Louis. In 2018, she had helped advocate for a Missouri law mandating insurance coverage of 3D mammography annually beginning at age 40; it became effective in 2019.

Yet, Dr. Patel found that many patients who are high risk for breast cancer still didn’t have access to the care they needed. When she recommended additional breast care screening and surveillance based on updated ACR guidelines, patients said that their insurance had denied them coverage, and they couldn’t afford the imaging out of pocket.

“I thought, ‘Maybe I’m in a position to do something about it,’” said Dr. Patel.

She reached out to state Sen. Lauren Arthur of Kansas City and asked her to meet for coffee. The two had become acquainted when the senator visited the Liberty Hospital Breast Center.

“I told Sen. Arthur about the gap in care for these women who are high risk for breast cancer, and about how there was similar legislation being passed all over the country, in both red states and blue states.

Unequivocally, she said would help,” Dr. Patel said.

Both Sen. Arthur and former state Rep. Jon Carpenter of Kansas City sponsored 2020 legislation, and Dr. Patel testified before the Senate. The legislation was passed that May and signed by the governor,

extending coverage for annual mammograms and supplemental screening to high-risk women in line with ACR Above Average Risk Imaging Recommendations.

Dr. Patel points out that the medical community has made great progress with technology and improving access to care, but there’s still a lot of work to do, including getting similar mammography legislation passed in Kansas.

She recommends that physicians develop relationships with their elected officials and advocacy groups.

“As physicians, we’re in a position of power to advocate for change,” said Dr. Patel. “We understand the needs because we live it every day. I encourage any physicians who have any modicum of interest in this kind of work to take the leap. We need physician advocates now more than ever.” ☺