

Mammography Screening in Austria – Status and Direction

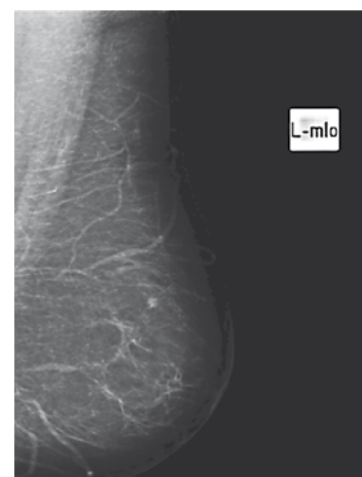
In June 2009 Alois Stöger, the Federal Minister for Health, announced that nationwide, structured mammography screening based on European quality guidelines for mammography screening will be introduced in Austria in 2010.

Together with the organisations involved in the screening (Austrian Medical Association, Austrian Society for Radiographers, Austrian Society for Medical Physics, etc...), the Gesundheit Österreich GmbH (GÖG), the national research and planning institute for health care in Austria, was asked to work out the necessary planning and implementation steps in the next few months, and also agree on a suitable number of screening units for Austria.

For decades women in Austria have already had access to free mammography examinations (opportunistic screening), which can be supplemented with ultrasound and MRI if necessary. The relevant Austrian standards (ÖNORM) require that X-ray systems and their peripherals meet the published technical quality control specifications (TQS). The Certificate of Quality for Diagnostic Mammography is a certification granted by BURA (Federal Radiological Society in Austria) for quality control measures, including radiologist training, application of the BIRADS classification and quality control measures which go beyond the level of the legally mandatory TQS. So far over 200 institutes in Austria have qualified for this certification.

In terms of mammography screening, both regional pilot projects and a pilot project covering several regions have been carried out in recent years. The multi-region pilot involved 11 screening units and conformed to the

EUREF guidelines for mammography screening (EPQC-V4) with TQS procedures, optimized to specifically fit Austrian needs. At the same time the reference centre for technical quality control (RefZQS) was also set up for the purpose of performing the tests specified in the EUREF-Guidelines. These include acceptance tests, six-monthly and annual tests as well as analysis of phantom images taken weekly in order to check the performance of the detector.



As expected, it was evident that it was mainly women who had previously never had a mammogram who took up invitations for screening.

The experiences of these pilot projects will now be incorporated into the structured mammography screening programme which will be implemented nationwide.

The programme will be carried out according to EUREF guidelines. Working groups which have now been formed, are discussing extensions such as additional use of ultrasound above a certain ACR classification (breast density), and therefore the presence of a radiologist at the screening itself, optional use of CAD for a second opinion, the use of teleradiology for a third opinion and the TQS best suited to conditions in Austria.

Nationwide, structured mammography screening in Austria can be expected to start between the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011.



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