

Breast Care Champions

With compassion and grit, Dr. Kamilia Kozlowski leads Knoxville Comprehensive Breast Center in the fight for transparent, patient-centered breast care.

In 1983, Dr. Kamilia Kozlowski had a dream of opening a comprehensive breast center dedicated to ensuring women receive compassionate, personalized care and timely results of their breast images. Today, Knoxville Comprehensive Breast Center (KCBC) is one of the nation's preeminent breast centers offering state-of-the-art technology and a specialized medical staff to ensure all women receive the care they deserve. The center is a testament to Dr. Kozlowski's determination to eliminate fear.

Following an intensive four-year residency at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, Dr. Kozlowski, a board-certified radiologist, joined the radiology department, where she discovered mammograms were not identifying the abnormalities referring physicians detected during a physical exam.

"I asked to bring the patients back to do an ultrasound to aid with the indeterminate findings," she says. In conjunction with mammograms, the additional ultrasounds aided in detecting abnormalities that weren't seen on mammograms alone.

A Patient's Advocate

Upon moving to Knoxville in 1982, Dr. Kozlowski discovered the group that gave her a verbal job confirmation prior to her move no longer wanted her. "No one would hire a female radiologist," she shares. "I thought, 'If no hospital will hire me, I'm starting my own breast center.'" Two months after moving, she began the process of opening a center. In May of 1983, KCBC welcomed its first patients, and after one day in operation, more than 40 calls poured in



LEFT: KCBC groundbreaking with Governor Bill Haslam and Knox County Mayor Mike Ragsdale.
MIDDLE: Dr. Kamilia Kozlowski.
RIGHT: Dr. Kozlowski (far left) with her son, sister, and mother.



“
The greatest part was getting
my results before I left.
This is the only place I will
ever come for my
mammograms.”

Teresa Barnes, Patient



from women curious about receiving breast imaging with same-day results.

"News started spreading that cancer could be detected before we feel it," Dr. Kozlowski says. "I performed physical breast exams, went over mammography films, and explained to patients what the images showed." She understood the need to interpret results for patients immediately following their exams to assuage the anxiety that came with waiting weeks to hear from their doctors, which wasn't, and still is not, widely done.

In addition to her professional encounters, a personal experience with misinterpreted information fuels her drive to provide patients with accurate readings of their results. Due to a belief that she had cancer, Dr. Kozlowski's mother underwent a surgical biopsy.

“
You made my first
mammogram painless and
eased my nerves!”

Heather Winkle, Patient

Upon emerging from the procedure, her mother was told by the surgeon that "everything went well," leading her to believe she was going to be OK. In reality, Dr. Kozlowski's mother had thyroid lymphoma, and the false hope instilled by the surgeon made it more difficult for Dr. Kozlowski to tell her mother she had cancer. "I vowed that when women came to my office, we would review the images with them and be honest in telling them the results, whether positive or negative," Dr. Kozlowski says.

It's a vow she has kept. Today, KCBC is lauded for the close relationship it fosters between doctor and patient. "We're not just radiologists reading an image," Dr. Kozlowski says. "We come out of the reading room to interact and communicate with our patients. I want them to feel confident in understanding their results and in asking any questions."

From Fear to Freedom

The greatest problem women were facing, Dr. Kozlowski shares, was a combination of impersonal, delayed readings and faulty imaging results.

"With dense breast tissue, which around half of all women have, the sensitivity of a mammogram to detect a potential cancer is greatly reduced," she notes. "Breast cancer can appear on mammograms in many forms, but it's always white. However, dense breast tissue also appears white. Detecting breast cancer in dense breasts can be like trying to find a penny in a glass of milk." Until recently, physicians were not required to tell women their breast density, causing patients to form a false belief that their results were normal when that may or may not have been the case.

Dr. Kozlowski petitioned for and successfully passed the Breast Density Inform law in Tennessee in 2014, which requires physicians to inform patients if they have dense breast tissue that could inhibit accurate screening results. That determination has inspired other states to pass similar breast health legislation.

"As radiologists, we have a duty to our patients to inform them and to

not assume that their primary care physician will tell them they have dense breasts," she says.

On the Cutting Edge

In KCBC, Dr. Kozlowski has built a practice centered on transparency and compassionate care—a practice that supports the fight for patient education and improvements in breast imaging technology. With a multidisciplinary team including clinical breast radiologists, oncologists, and pathologists, KCBC provides state-of-the-art imaging technology to ensure women of any age and stage of life receive comprehensive breast care.

"From mammograms to ultrasounds to needle biopsies and same-day results, we are continuing to make advancements in the field," Dr. Kozlowski shares.

Cancer detection technology may have improved tremendously since her first days as a young doctor vying for additional imaging modalities, but the reason Dr. Kozlowski is passionate about her work has remained consistent. "Finding subtleties before they're obvious is key to long-term survival," she urges. "Anyone can detect obvious breast cancers on mammograms; however, not everyone will take the time to concentrate on subtle patterns that could indicate cancer. Early detection saves lives."

“
You all make it easier to get
my yearly mammogram.”

Barbara McNeil, Patient

KCBC
SCREENING • DIAGNOSIS • TREATMENT
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Breast Center**

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