

On the Spot

Mammography skin markers identify areas of concern and pain

By Mary Lang

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IN 1983, WHEN THE BEEKLEY CORPORATION INTRODUCED X-SPOT®, the first professional skin marker for diagnostic imaging, it was quickly adapted in mammography departments to mark areas of interest on the breast. Although the marker served as a visual cue for radiologists regarding areas of concern, communication was imperfect when multiple areas on the breast were marked with the 1.5-mm pellet marker. Without a consistent method of identifying a mole, palpable anomaly, or nipple on a single breast, patient films prompted questions and resulted in unnecessary additional work-ups to clarify results.

As a result, the Bristol, Conn.-based Beekley worked with a local radiologist to devise a four-shape communication system for marking areas of concern more effectively. The Beekley Skin Marking System employs uniquely shaped markers to identify nipples, circles-moles, lines-scars, and triangles-palpable masses in mammography. The system has become a visual, universal language to supplement written documentation and improve communication between mammography technologists and interpreting physicians.

ADDING A FIFTH SHAPE

Beekley recently added Altus™ to the Skin Marking System for Mammography™ to enhance the ability to clarify mammographic images. Altus was created in response to practices and needs within the breast imaging community. Radiologists and technologists were looking for an alternate-shaped skin marker to identify and document areas of pain, or non-palpable areas of concern, such as skin thickening, rashes, bruises, and bug bites, directly on mammographic images.

A survey conducted by Beekley at the 2007 and 2008 Radiological Society of North American conferences noted that 55 percent of radiologists believed adding a fifth shape to the skin marking system for non-palpable areas was a good idea. "I think a marker designating areas of pain and concern will be valuable in diagnostic mammography," says Gary Whitman, MD, of the M. D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.

Beekley learned that the lack of a specific shape skin marker to indicate these non-palpable areas caused many facilities to either leave the area unmarked, but notated on the patient history sheet, or to use an existing marker usually reserved for another

application to alert the radiologist of an area that required additional attention during an image study.

Feedback from breast imaging professionals was that both these solutions were not ideal and that they tended to cause more confusion and questions, especially when using markers meant for another application. In one example related to Beekley's research, there was an instance when a patient presented with a palpable area in one breast and an area of pain in the other. Not quite sure what to do, the technologist marked both areas with the triangular palpable mass marker. The marking created confusion for the radiologist, but he admitted he didn't have a viable solution to the problem.

IMPROVING WORKFLOW AND PATIENT SATISFACTION

Because Altus identifies and documents non-palpable areas of concern or pain, its distinct shape immediately clarifies for the radiologist that the area marked by a square is different from any other physically manifested area during an image study. Debbie Jones, mammography supervisor at the Imaging Center in Warner Robbins, Ga., agrees that Altus has helped streamline communication between her technologists and radiologists. "We use the Altus marker to mark dimpling of skin or for any other reason that the other Beekley markers don't cover. The patients benefit because the radiologist can differentiate this area from other problems," such as moles, nipple markers, and palpable areas, she says. "It is time-efficient because the radiologist knows the marker shapes and what they are used for; therefore we have to interrupt each other less."

Since being introduced last December, Altus has been a beneficial addition to skin-marking protocols at many breast centers. In addition, patient satisfaction has increased. Mammographers have reported that patients are receptive toward Altus and feel that their concerns are validated when the technologist applies a special marker on their area of pain so the doctor can be aware of it.

CLARIFYING COMMUNICATION

Steven J. Zweig, MD, a radiologist at Alpena General Hospital in Alpena, Mich., says Altus has increased his mammography

department's communication with ultrasound. "Beekley's area of concern square skin markers fill a need, which serves a dual purpose," he says. "Not only does Altus help the radiologist focus in on the area of concern, but it helps our sonographers as well. After their mammogram, many patients are sent for a breast ultrasound to further evaluate the area in question. By leaving the markers on the patient, the sonographer knows exactly where to place the transducer."

At Borgess at Woodland Hills Radiology in Woodland Hills, Mich., Altus is also used to enhance communication between mammography and ultrasound, in addition to being used to communicate clinical findings indicated on a referring physician's order.

Radiology manager Kathy Sparrow-Dinzik feels that Altus "is an excellent tool that will increase our ability to provide clear communication from the patient and clinician to the radiologist. It also allows us to archive that communication in a standard way for future review by other radiologists or clinicians. The patients, technologists, and physicians all benefit from better communication."

Since Altus is seen directly on the mammographic image, it provides permanent documentation of an area of concern that follows patients if they change facilities or move out of the area.

PROVIDING SEE-THROUGH IMAGING

Altus is made with Beekley's patented low-density materials; Light Image™ for film screen and digital mammography; and Designed for Digital™, an ultra low-density material for more sensitive digital equipment. In both versions, the 1-mm uniform density square highlights an area of concern or pain with complete visibility of the tissue detail. Like all Beekley skin markers, Altus is lead-free, latex-free, and hypoallergenic.

Beekley uses medical grade adhesive labels that flex with the patient's skin under compression and stay right on the mark without shifting or moving during an exam to provide reliable images. The markers remove easily, and don't pull or tear patients' skin.

"We work very closely with radiologists and technologists to create products that serve a function to improve read time, enable easier interpretation, and provide the added insurance policy of permanent documentation directly on the image," says Melissa Vibberts, Beekley's product manager for mammography.

| Mary Lang is the marketing communications manager at the Beekley Corp. in Bristol, Conn. Questions and comments can be directed to editorial@rt-image.com.



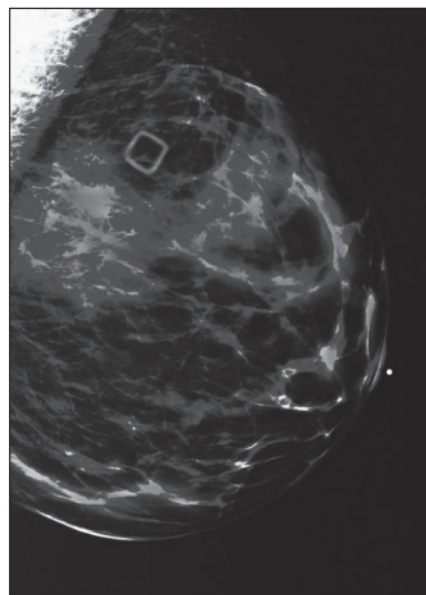
Mammography Skin Markers for Areas of Concern or Pain

Radiologists & Technologists have requested a new shape to better communicate the location of an area of interest or point of pain.

The Altus skin marker was developed as a square shape to immediately identify an area of interest such as a bug bite, rash or a bruise.

The square shape for Areas of Concern or Pain eliminates:

- Confusion on the area being marked.
- Image retakes to clarify areas of concern or pain.
- Questions when a history chart is not attached to images.
- Notes that require further clarification.



Square = Area of Concern or Pain

To receive free samples to evaluate Altus or to place a risk-free order call 1-800-BEEKLEY (233-5539) Fax: 800-735-1234 Visit us on the web at www.beekley.com or email info@beekley.com