



**WILLIAM
OSLER
HEALTH
CENTRE**

Osler This Month

Bone Density Unit Opens at William Osler Health Centre - Georgetown

A new bone mineral density (BMD) unit opened its doors last month at William Osler Health Centre - Georgetown. This means patients in Halton Hills and surrounding areas no longer have to travel to other communities to be tested for osteoporosis.

The loss of bone mass is a natural occurrence in both men and women as they age. However, osteoporosis is an *abnormal* loss of bone mineral density. Bones become more porous and fragile, which can result in fractures from even minor shocks or falls. Osteopenia is a less severe form of the disease.

Women are particularly susceptible to these conditions because of hormonal changes during menopause. Other risk factors include:

- a family history of osteoporosis or osteopenia
- smoking
- alcohol use
- low calcium intake
- lack of exercise or prolonged immobilization
- long-term use of certain drugs like steroids or thyroid medication
- ethnic group - Caucasian or Asian

Dr. Joseph Fairbrother is the Corporate Chief of Diagnostic Imaging at Osler and is certified as a clinical densitometrist by the International Society for Clinical Densitometry. He notes that as our population ages, the rate of fractures suffered by seniors will rise, and the consequences can be debilitating.

"Significant numbers of patients who have hip fractures, for example, subsequently have impaired mobility and may be confined to wheelchairs or need other mobility aids.



Technologist, Dionne Williams

The impact on patients is substantial. If we can identify patients at risk and modify their risk factor profiles, that will certainly help in reducing the number of fractures that occur."

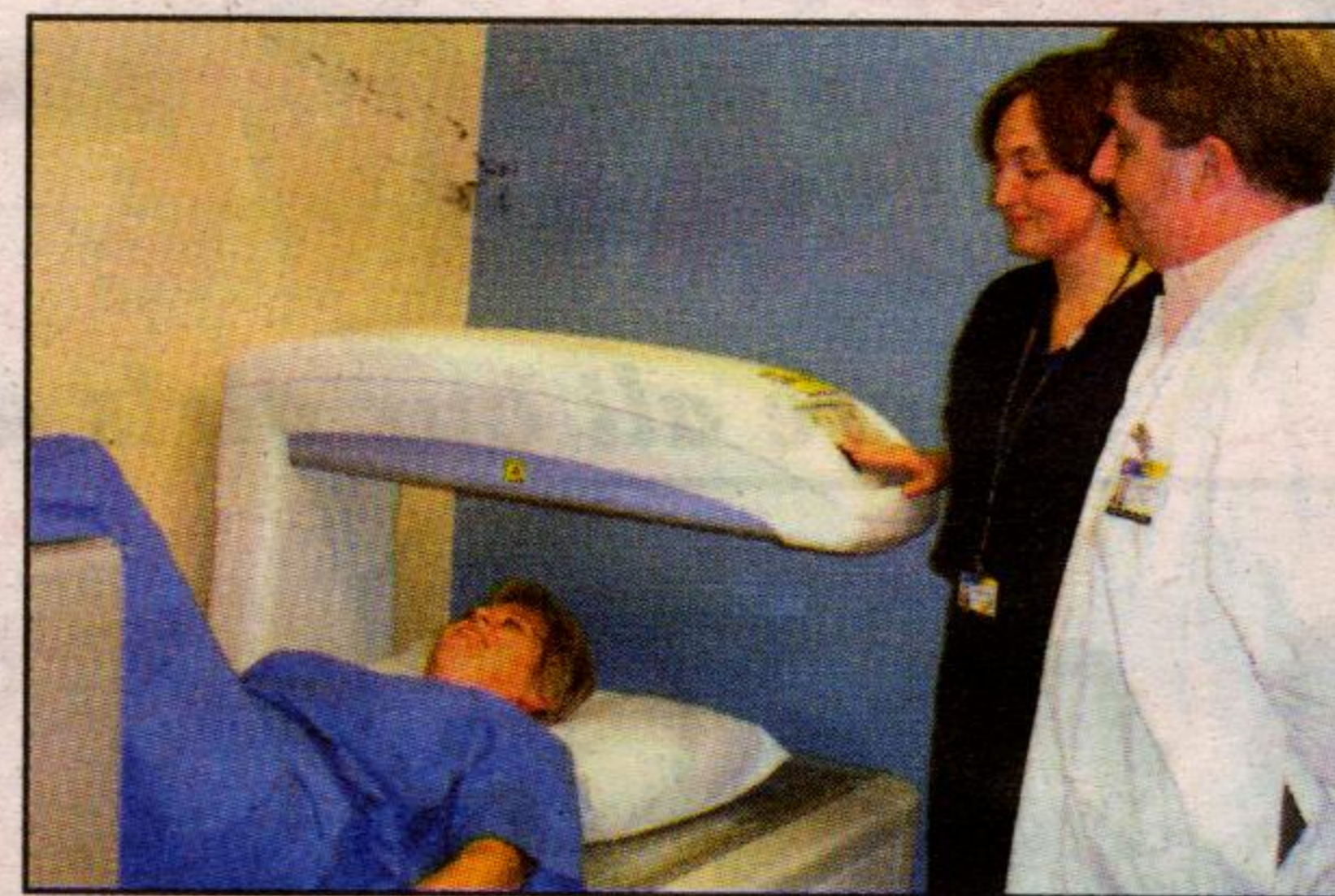
Testing for BMD is fast and totally painless. Patients who come to the unit first fill out a questionnaire to

identify risk factors in family history or lifestyle. Next, they lie on a table and a bone densitometry machine scans the spine and hips. The scan is similar to a very low-dose x-ray and takes about 10 to 15 seconds. The data is then interpreted by a radiologist and passed on to the patient's physician. Dr. Fairbrother suggests that people subsequently be tested every two to four years so that skeletal health can be monitored over time.

Since osteoporosis is a "silent" disease, patients may not even be aware of a problem until they have a fracture at which point the disease is harder to treat. But if bone loss is detected early, it is possible to maintain and even improve skeletal health with medication and lifestyle changes. Dr. Fairbrother finds many patients with low bone density can actually increase bone mass significantly with medical therapy. "That's the importance of identifying patients who have no symptoms whatsoever and yet in their first BMD exam are found to have osteoporosis," he says. "By intervening, we can substantially improve the quality of the skeleton and reduce the risk of fractures."

With osteopenia, in some cases no medication is necessary, but the diagnosis can serve as a wake-up call to take action to prevent further loss of bone mineral density.

An added benefit of the new service is that it offers women the convenience of combining mammography and BMD screenings. Previously, women could have breast screening done in Georgetown but had to go to Brampton or Etobicoke for bone density testing. These two examinations are usually recommended for women fifty and older.



Demonstrating the new densitometry machine
l-r Technologists in the radiology department,
Jeannie Brookes and Dionne Williams with Dr. Joseph
Fairbrother looking on.

All residents of Georgetown and the surrounding communities are welcome to take advantage of the BMD unit with a physician referral. If patients wish to combine mammography and BMD screenings, arrangements can be made at the time of booking. The unit's hours of operation are Monday to Friday, 8 am to 4:30 pm.

**We are many people with many skills.....
Here are some Osler people
and what they have to say about
working at Georgetown Hospital Campus.**



Peggy Strack has worked in the Administration office at William Osler Health Centre, Georgetown for the past four years.

"The people here have a heart," Peggy says. "The word 'hello' is still a *feel good* word."

When asked about what she likes about the Georgetown community Peggy simply answers ... "It's home."

According to Beverley Roberts, Georgetown is close enough to Toronto to provide all the perks of city life but with the closeness and caring of a rural community.

Beverley is a Clinical Coder in the Health Information Management Department of the hospital and has been with Osler for 18 years.

What does she like about working at Georgetown campus? Says Beverley, "The feeling of family that comes from working in an environment that strongly promotes teamwork and recognizes individuals and group contributions to making the workplace happy and productive."



**Diagnostic Services
Available at
Georgetown campus:**
Bone density
Mammography
X-ray
Ultrasound
Echocardiography