

Breast Assured Episode 3: Get to Know Dr. Lotfi: Background, Personal Stories, and Meaningful Patient-Physician Relationships

Connecticut Breast Imaging

Summary:

Dr. Parisa Lotfi is the director of Breast Imaging at the new flagship office in Brookfield, Connecticut. Dr. Lotfi has an extensive career in breast imaging and is well-respected in the field.

00:03 - 00:25

Dr. Madhavi Raghu

Hello and welcome back to Breast Assured: Conversations About Breast Health. I am your host, Dr. Madhavi Raghu. Today I'd like to introduce Dr. Parisa Lotfi, Connecticut Breast Imaging's Director of Breast Imaging at the new flagship office in Brookfield, Connecticut. We welcome her to our podcast series. We hope you enjoy our conversation.

00:33 - 00:49

Dr. Madhavi Raghu

Welcome, Dr. Parisa Lotfi, we are so glad that you joined our practice. You have an extensive career in breast imaging and you are well-respected in the field of radiology. Please share with us your background so that we can better get to know you.

00:50 - 01:48

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

I come from a family of physicians, and since I was a little girl, I knew that I wanted to be a doctor. My father is an obstetrician, and in fact, I witnessed my first delivery when I was 13. That was very inspirational to me and I kind of decided that I wanted to dedicate my life to taking care of women, just like my dad did. And in fact, when I was in medical school, I worked at his office and was really adamant that I wanted to be an obstetrician gynecologist until I did a real rotation and decided that was definitely not for me. But I really stayed dedicated to taking care of women. And once I went into radiology and came across breast imaging, I knew that this is my way of contributing to women's care.

01:49 - 02:42

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

Once I finished residency training and did a fellowship, I started concentrating on breast imaging more and more every year. In fact, as a side, I'm also married to a breast surgeon, and this collaboration allows us to do a lot of sharing of information, not information about patients, but information about what's in the field. We do a lot of pillow talk and talking about, you know, management of difficult or complicated cases or just in terms of what have you learned when you went to this conference that's applicable. So that's been really insightful, having that partnership with my husband. We did work together for a few years when I was in Boston, which was really nice for patients. They had a team taking care of them.

02:42 - 03:32

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

Now that I am here in Connecticut, I really want to dedicate my time fully to taking care of women the best that I can. And that means as a director, to making sure the center is run in a smooth manner where everybody is welcome. The staff here is fantastic. They are very, very dedicated to the cause. They really care about every single patient. And aside from the staff, I have been really impressed by all of the dedicated, well-trained breast imagers, and they really are truly exceptional. And I've been really impressed by Dr. Raghu's mentorship and dedication to make this happen.

03:33 - 04:02

Dr. Madhavi Raghu

Well, thank you for those kind words, Dr. Lotfi. You clearly have an extensive amount of experience and a clear passion for taking care of patients, and especially women, which is a huge need in our society. I know you alluded to your decision to pursue breast imaging after you completed the radiology residency – was there a moment, was there a story, was there something that touched you, that led you towards breast imaging as a subspecialty?

04:02 - 04:36

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

So in general, I'm a very image oriented person. I love looking at pictures. I have a photographic memory. So going into radiology was a no brainer for me. I really, really liked pictures. And the other reason I run into radiology is the fact that it's so broad and you have to have extensive knowledge in anatomy and physiology and different disease processes. But I knew that that was too extensive for anyone and I really wanted to specialize in in something.

04:36 - 05:10

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

And I did start out by doing a ton of oncology, which then became specifically breast oncology. And the reason I wanted to do breast is because it's kind of a unique field. You actually get to become a patient's doctor. When I see a patient who has a breast issue, either benign or malignant, I become their doctor. I look at their images, I examine the breast, I advise them about different issues they could have, for example, if they have pain or if they want guidance

05:10 - 05:35

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

in terms of breast health or imaging, I can do all of that. And also I really like doing procedures. That's the one thing that separates breast imaging from other specialties in radiology. I not only look at pictures, but also put together the imaging findings with the clinical findings. And I can do needle guided biopsies very quickly.

05:35 - 06:28

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

And in fact, that's the one thing that we like to be implemented at the center is same day biopsies where a patient gets the care if there is an imaging abnormality the day that I see them – we can efficiently and safely do the biopsy of the abnormality the same day if that's what the patient desires and get the pathology results in the next two, three days, which is very special and very much appreciated by the referring physicians and by the patients. Although breast malignancies or even other conditions related to the breast are not, medical emergencies they're definitely a psychological emergency that we recognize and we really want to deal with it as quickly and as kindly as possible.

06:28 - 06:59

Dr. Madhavi Raghu

Absolutely. I totally agree with that. And I think for our listeners, one of the things that really struck me about Dr. Parisa Lotfi was when I met her, clearly, she has the expertise and the intelligence to make appropriate and accurate diagnoses, but it does take a very special person to take care of breast health and breast imaging or offer breast care for our patients. It's so important to have the empathy, the kindness, the thoughtfulness. It really requires an excellent bedside manner.

07:00 - 07:11

Dr. Madhavi Raghu

So, what do you think should be the vision for Connecticut Breast Imaging that all of us should embody and incorporate into our work?

07:12 - 07:43

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

I'm absolutely thrilled to be here as a Director of Connecticut Breast Imaging, hoping to implement this new paradigm of total breast care here, which includes imaging and guidance to our patients in a compassionate, empathetic and timely manner. You know, we have a whole team of amazing expert breast imagers, but also, we will provide compassionate and empathetic care to our patients.

07:44 - 08:15

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

We understand the anxiety it takes to come in even for a screening mammogram and you have no issues. We also understand the toll it can take on you when you're waiting to get your biopsy results or waiting to get the diagnostic imaging. So, we do our best to alleviate that anxiety by providing patients with same day screening results to accommodate biopsies and making sure that our results get back quickly to the patients.

08:15 - 08:50

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

I am available all the time. I provide my cell phone number to my patients. In fact, just this last weekend, I talked to a patient about her results that came in very late on Friday, and I know she was super anxious, so I called her on Saturday and talked to her about it. We'd like to make it the jewel of breast imaging in Connecticut, where women know and trust the doctors will take care of them and know that once they come here, they're not abandoned. They're taken care of as fully as possible.

08:50 - 09:39

Dr. Madhavi Raghu

Right. And I think that's important because we want our patients to have a nice relationship with their radiologist, that they should be able to ask us questions. And certainly, as we move forward and patients have their results available on the portal, they will be able to communicate with us. But we're also just a quick phone call away. The other I think benefit and great thing about Connecticut Breast Imaging is that we actually offer, as you know, the comprehensive breast script, which enables patients to move seamlessly from screening to biopsy, hopefully with one script. So really, I think the other piece of this is we're also refer friendly as well. So how has that impacted your experience in terms of having this script where patients can come in and have a screening mammogram and perhaps even the biopsy potentially the same day?

09:39 - 10:29

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

Yeah, this is huge. It's actually what makes this center so, so special. Having this script allows me to go from a screening mammogram, to a diagnostic mammogram, to a diagnostic ultrasound and the biopsy the same day where at other centers or other facilities where I don't have the script, a patient would have to go come back another day for the diagnostic workup, another day for the biopsy, and in the meantime, spend a lot of time either trying to get an appointment with their physician to be seen or get a prescription from them to be faxed to us. And all of that takes time and, in my experience, adds to the patient's anxiety.

10:29 - 10:53

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

So having this script in hand makes it so easy for patients and also for the referrers who don't have to answer the phone calls or do the extra steps to put in additional orders or scripts for the diagnostic workup and the biopsy. So, the referrers love it and it makes their life much easier.

10:54 - 10:55

Dr. Madhavi Raghu

Makes our lives easier, too.

10:55 - 10:57

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

It does. It's good for everyone.

10:57 - 11:12

Dr. Madhavi Raghu

That's right. Yes. I mean, it just it you know, really within an hour, a patient can go from a screening to a biopsy very quickly. So, I know there is some hesitancy on a patient's part in terms of receiving screening or undergoing screening mammograms.

11:12 - 11:17

Dr. Madhavi Raghu

What are some of the challenges in the field of breast imaging really from a patient's perspective?

11:18 - 12:03

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

These challenges are quite population dependent, but so far, since I've been in Connecticut, some of the challenges that I see are, number one, related to misinformation or lack of appropriate breast health education. For example, patients think because I don't have a family history, I don't need a mammogram. But the fact is the vast majority of patients who get breast cancer don't have a family history. If they have a family history, they're more likely to get breast cancer. But the vast majority of our diagnoses are in patients who don't have a family history. So we try, you know, every single encounter with every patient. I try to add a little bit of education there for them.

12:04 - 12:30

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

The other thing is misconception or misinformation, as women think if they get older, that they're okay because they think, oh, I've made it so far without having any issues and I'm going to be okay. But the fact is, breast cancer is much more prevalent in older women, and we make more diagnosis in patients older than age 60. So it's even more important as women age to come in for their screening mammograms.

12:31 - 13:27

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

The other challenge is the financial hit. Potentially, patients may endure during the diagnostic workup. Depending on the patient's insurances. They can have co-pays or co-insurance for the diagnostic workup, which includes a diagnostic mammogram or ultrasound or the biopsy. Additionally, if they have to have an MRI for screening or diagnostic purposes, that's an additional cost not all insurances cover. Given the economic decline in the last couple of years, that's been a real issue for some patients. There was a lot of delay in care and diagnosis the last two years, particularly the year of COVID. A lot of centers are closed. You know, even patients who had lumps or issues or other signs of cancer were not able to get the care that they wanted or were afraid to get COVID and didn't come in.

13:27 - 13:56

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

Some of the challenges for women are lack of time. They certainly are busy. A lot of our clientele are professionals. They're working women. They have little children, and it's very hard to make time during the day. At Connecticut Breast Imaging, we offer after hour mammograms, we offer Saturday mammograms – that's huge! That's really important to be able to cater to the needs of all kinds of women.

13:57 - 14:34

Dr. Madhavi Raghu

I think that's been a big challenge, especially during COVID. So many patients have elected not to have a screening mammogram. But now that it's been two years, we're still through the throes of the pandemic, but Connecticut Breast Imaging is very safe – there's lots of procedures in place and protocols in place to ensure that the patient remains safe. And I think that one of the other distinguishing features of Connecticut breast imaging is that the rates are reasonably affordable for patients in terms of obtaining their studies. And we will, of course, work with patients to if they are encountering any sort of financial hardship.

14:34 - 15:07

Dr. Madhavi Raghu

But you're absolutely right, there's so many challenges for patients during this time. And it's it is unique, partially due to COVID. In your perspective, do you think that it's reasonably safe for patients to return for screening now, even during this pandemic time? And second question is that I know patients are getting vaccines and boosters all the time. We've encouraged patients to come in because we want don't want to delay their care. But what are your thoughts related to COVID and screening?

15:07 - 15:55

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

Yeah, absolutely. We need to reassure our patients that at Connecticut Breast Imaging, we make our business to create a safe environment. All the staff are still wearing masks. Almost everyone that I know of is vaccinated fully. We really have created such a workflow that patients are not sitting alongside each other and busy crammed waiting rooms for their studies. Everything is sanitized, everything is cleansed very well. Patients definitely should feel safe coming here and not delaying their care. Patients are still mandated to wear a mask here, which is I think, a good thing and good for everyone.

15:56 - 16:29

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

It's time to get back to our routine and take care of ourselves. And that means starting with screening mammography and even more importantly, paying attention to our bodies. And if there is an issue, if there is a lump, if there is an area that hurts us, if there is discharge or any other issue like skin changes, nipple changes, those are all things that we need to pay attention to as women and come in for evaluation.

16:29 - 16:34

Dr. Madhavi Raghu

I agree. I agree. I think it is time for us to put ourselves first and take care of ourselves.

16:34 - 16:42

Dr. Madhavi Raghu

So, do you have a particular story about a patient encounter as a physician practicing in breast imaging?

16:42 - 17:00

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

The stories that touch me the most are the younger patients. I've had a 21-year-old die from metastatic breast cancer, and that was devastating to me, right, because you just don't think of a 21 year old getting cancer, let alone dying.

17:00 - 17:01

Dr. Madhavi Raghu

Practically unheard of. Yeah.

17:02 - 17:45

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

Like I said, depending on where you are and where you're practicing, obviously when I was in Boston, there was a referring center and a lot of patients came with complicated diagnoses and presentation, and we saw all kinds of ages. But definitely those younger patients make a mark on me. I've had to diagnose quite a few pregnant patients in the last 20 years, and that's really very difficult to go through as a physician and as a patient clearly. That is not an easy conversation to have with pregnant patients and I do remember every single one.

17:45 - 18:16

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

I also have a personal story of my husband being diagnosed with colorectal cancer three years ago and was on the other side of receiving the information and the diagnosis. And I remember the feeling of being overwhelmed, completely shocked and really lost. I felt kind of abandoned and vacuum not knowing which way I was going to fall and what's up, what's down.

18:16 - 18:53

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

And this was a year journey that really shook us to our core, both physicians who deal with cancer every day. We were not at all prepared for this diagnosis and didn't know how to navigate the system that we worked in to get the results we did. So that really opened my eyes to the patient experience going through this journey. The journey doesn't have to be necessarily for cancer treatment. It's just a

medical journey of having medical issues and knowing where to go and what to do with it and how to get the results that every patient deserves.

18:53 - 19:46

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

I took some time off after my husband had surgery, and I remember the very first patient that I had to tell she had cancer. I started crying before she did. It was just so traumatic for me to have to go through that experience knowing what kind of impact is having on her. And that this is the one negative about my job is that everyone remembers that moment that I tell them they have cancer and everyone remembers me as that negative interaction, which hopefully they will remember in the future that it was a good thing for them and that breast cancer is not a deadly cancer compared to some other diseases, and that there's always hope and cure, especially for any kind of image detected breast cancer.

19:46 - 20:37

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

There are all lower stages and very, very treatable, which makes it very important for women to get their screening done because anything that we can find on a screening, for the most part is treatable. It is personal for me. I really know what it feels like to have gone through the journey, and I want to make sure that every woman comes out healthy, a success story, just like my husband was. The good news is the vast majority of my work ends up being negative or benign. You know, we don't diagnose breast cancer all the time, and women should not be afraid to come in for screening or for diagnostic purposes. The vast majority turns out to be nothing.

20:38 - 20:41

Dr. Madhavi Raghu

First of all, I hope your husband's okay and healthy.

20:41 - 20:45

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

He's wonderful. Yes, thriving and doing well.

20:46 - 20:59

Dr. Madhavi Raghu

Good, that's most important. Secondly, I think this completely humanizes the process. Clearly, that's what you, you know, as a physician, I'm sure it's humanized the entire process for you and you're probably a better physician for it and the type of care that you deliver to your patients.

21:00 - 21:47

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

I think as physicians, we're just trained to be empathetic. I think that's the nature of our profession. You know for the most part, we all are, and that's why we go into medicine. It does make it more real and can make for very difficult days when you suffer with your patients because you feel their pain. It's much easier to separate yourself from the human and just treat the disease. But I think if you're able to combine both, it makes for a better story for everyone. The patients appreciate it, and it's certainly more fulfilling for me to take care of a patient knowing I'm making a difference.

21:48 - 21:59

Dr. Madhavi Raghu

That really comes through. You know, I can see that, you know, just in our conversation and I'm sure the care that you deliver and shower on the patients that come through at Connecticut Breast Imaging.

21:59 - 22:18

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

Thank you. But I also think that everybody else in the team is along the same mentality here at Connecticut Breast Imaging. We're all very well-trained breast imagers who went through this kind of training that we're treating women and not just their images.

22:18 - 22:47

Dr. Madhavi Raghu

Correct. And I think that's all the breast imagers that work here, they're fellowship trained and this is what they do. This is their life. And you're absolutely right. You're part of a team. You're part of a family that believes in the same exact ideal of what we want to do for patients and the community at large. So I want to thank you for your time today and for giving us a little glimpse into who you are. We're just so lucky at Connecticut Breast Imaging that you've decided to join our family.

22:48 - 22:58

Dr. Parisa Lotfi

Thank you. It's been my honor and I'm really super excited to be here and be part of the community in Connecticut and taking care of the women.

23:03 - 23:26

Dr. Madhavi Raghu

Thanks for listening. We would greatly appreciate it if you subscribe to our podcast and left a review on Apple, Spotify or whatever you're listening to. Share it with a friend to help us raise awareness and make breast health a priority for everyone. You can also check us out at our website at ctbreastimaging.org to learn more or to make an appointment. Thanks, and see you next time.