

A Simple Self-Exam to Save Women from Harm- Breast carcinoma

Maria Dawson

Dear Madam,

Through this letter I wish to shed light on the burden of breast cancer in Pakistan, the problems that the lack of prompt and proper treatment render for both the doctors as well as patients and ways to minimise the disease burden in our society.

Breast cancer is a health problem that women all over the world face, and its prognosis and treatment is defined by the stage at which it is diagnosed. As far as the epidemiology of breast cancer is concerned, it contributes significantly to cancer related mortality, especially in developing countries. Moreover, it has been noted that breast cancer kills nearly 40,000 women each year in Pakistan¹. This makes Pakistan the country with the highest incidence of breast cancer in Asia. However, the exact statistics regarding breast cancer are difficult to describe due to the shortage of tumour registries. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the disease affects not only women among the older age groups but young women as well².

The risk factors for a woman to have breast cancer are manifold: of these, hormonal imbalances which may or may not be associated with menarche at a young age, nulliparity, old age at the time of the birth of first child and lack of breastfeeding have been documented as important risk factors³. Moreover, the presence of Breast can-

cer 1 (BRCA1) and Breast cancer 2 (BRCA2) gene mutations in women has shown to contribute significantly towards both breast and ovarian cancers⁴. Consanguineous marriages in women who have the aforementioned mutations put them at a higher risk than those who do not have the gene mutation⁴. Keeping these factors in mind, early detection and prompt treatment favours better prognosis. The developing countries however, have a high case fatality rate - primarily due to lack of awareness, as well as access to prompt diagnosis and proper treatment. Studies have shown that early detection of breast cancer can promote the chances for survival⁵ and complete recovery may be anticipated in most of the cases.

An important factor in the early detection of breast cancer is the self breast examination, which is a rough estimate or the feeling of a palpable mass and can be carried out by women themselves in the comfort of their home. Throughout the developed countries, it has become a regular practise - particularly carried out by those women who know they are at a higher risk for breast cancer. Unfortunately, in our part of the world majority of the women are unaware of the risks of breast cancer, let alone practising self examination. There is a greater chance of the morbidity and mortality statistics of breast cancer incidence to decline if self breast examination were to become a regular practise in both high as well as low socioeconomic strata of the society.

It has been documented that self examination of the breast and awareness regarding it has been beneficial for women who are at a higher risk for developing breast carcinoma⁵. Therefore, this exami-

Final Year Student,
Karachi Medical and Dental College

Correspondence: Maria Dawson
Final year student KMDC
Email: dawsonlegal@gmail.com
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nation should be taught to all women of reproductive age via advertisements on social media as well as television and personal contact with doctors during their visit to the hospital or clinics. Furthermore, they should be advised to perform this self-examination regularly so as to escape the future dangers of advanced stages breast carcinoma.

References

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