

The Role of The Community and its Impact on Breast Cancer Awareness

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Early detection is the key towards longevity and survival against all diseases especially regarding the disease of cancer.¹ Due to various factors like genetics, life style, stress, obesity, exposure to ionizing radiation there has been an increase in cancer detection in different populations.² Our work at the Federal Breast Cancer Screening Centre (PIMS/SZABMU) has further highlighted this issue especially in the case of Breast Cancer. Our programme has a large component spreading the awareness of breast cancer in the community which has led to a substantial increase in the awareness for screening mammography and hence early detection. Initially, our experience with the community made us realize that in our health system there is no significant community interaction to spread the awareness of breast cancer especially in the rural population. The awareness activities are generally confined to urban localities and are restricted to putting up banners, advertisement in electronic media, symposiums, walks, lectures etc but there is no grass root interaction with the common person especially in rural settings. Our project targets the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) with special emphasis on the rural Islamabad whose health concerns are met primarily through the Basic Health Units (BHU's) and Rural Health Centres (RHC's) of Islamabad.

We used the Basic Health Units (BHU's) with its Lady Health Workers (LHW's) and their health houses as a pivotal point to have access to the rural community.

The mass contact awareness campaign especially in rural ICT accessed the people from all economic strata by using Lady Health Workers who were trained to teach the women self-examination and then to examine the symptomatic women themselves for further assessment. The Lady Health Workers through both the health houses and

door to door house hold campaign help spread the message of early detection of breast cancer in the rural ICT. This benefitted a large number of women who either because of lack of awareness, cultural inhibitions or scarce and economic resources were unable to realize the importance of the early detection of breast cancer.³

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Sessions were carried out in BHU's and RHC's combining both LHW's and the community for advocating the importance of early detection of breast cancer. These sessions were also participated by students of Schools and Universities of ICT and this created a platform where people from all segments of the social society bonded and a common platform for the awareness of early detection of the breast cancer was created.⁴⁻⁵

CREATION OF REFERRAL SYSTEM

There was no proper mechanism of a referral system in the ICT however, with the help of this community awareness campaign leading to a subsequent referral of mammography cases to the Federal Breast Cancer Screening Centre led to the creation of a referral system between the BHC's, RHC's and Tertiary Federal Breast Cancer Screening Centre at Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences, Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Medical University (PIMS/SZABMU), Islamabad.

This is the utmost of importance as it can pave the way for future in the creating a referral system between the Primary, Secondary and Tertiary health care centres of Islamabad for all health-related issues.

Keywords: Federal Breast Cancer Screening Programme (FBCSP), Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), Basic Health Unit (BHU), Rural Health Centre (RHC), Lady Health Worker (LHW).

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