



HBKU Press highlights advances in breast cancer awareness and screening and the need for a more holistic approach in the future

Doha, Qatar: The availability and accessibility of early breast cancer screening programs and the widespread public service announcements citing early detection of cancer as a key to a higher survival rate is on the rise, according to the National Cancer Strategy Review. While the disease is still the number one cancer among women in Qatar, early detection dramatically increases the success of available treatments as well as chances of survival.

Cancer occurs when the process of cell growth goes wrong: new cells form when the body doesn't need them or damaged cells do not die as they should. Cancer occurs when the process of cell growth goes wrong and new cells form when the body doesn't need them and old or damaged cells do not die as they should. When this occurs, a buildup of cells often forms a mass of tissue called a lump, growth, or tumor. Breast cancer occurs when cancerous tumors develop in the breast. These cells can spread by breaking away from the original tumor and entering blood vessels or lymph vessels, which branch into tissues throughout the body. When cancer cells travel to other parts of the body and begin damaging other tissues and organs, the process is called metastasis.

According to the World Health Organization, in 2014, cancers accounted for 18 % of the total deaths in Qatar among all age groups, which makes the proportional mortality rate second only to cardiovascular disease when considering internal, non-communicable diseases. Breast cancer specifically accounts for 31% of all cancers in females.

"Through HBKU Press's open access platform, QScience.com, peer-reviewed research papers and articles about cancer and a variety of other topics can be easily accessed online," explains Dr. Alwaleed Alkhaja, Senior Editor at HBKU Press. "New and innovative research is being published with HBKU Press every day, and these relevant articles join our impressive archive of research articles from previous years. The value of these past research articles is that they play a particularly important role when considering how far research has developed on any given issue, and in this case, analysing the development of cancer screening practices and awareness campaigns in Qatar."

A research study published in the *Avicenna* journal, available on QScience.com, highlights the alarming past statistics and attitudes concerning breast cancer awareness and screening.



The study, **“Breast cancer screening among Arabic women living in the State of Qatar: Awareness, knowledge, and participation in screening activities,”** was published at a time when Qatar was facing a rise in breast cancer incidence, and previous findings indicated that women in Qatar were often diagnosed with breast cancer at advanced stages as their participation rates in screening activities were low. To that end, an interview survey was conducted with 1,063 Arabic women (Qatari citizens and non-Qatari Arabic-speaking residents), 35 years of age or older, from March 2011 to July 2011. The survey results found that of the women who participated in the study, 90.7% were aware of breast cancer. Of those women, 7.6% were assessed with having basic knowledge of breast cancer screening (BCS); 28.9% were aware of breast self-examination (BSE); 41.8% were aware of clinical breast exams (CBE), and 26.9% were aware of mammograms.

The lack of wide-spread knowledge translated to the low rates of breast cancer screenings and self-examinations by the women in the study. Only 13.8% performed BSE monthly, 31.3% had a CBE once a year or once every two years, and 26.9% of women 40 years of age or older had a mammogram once a year or once every two years.

A greater awareness and knowledge of BCS, education levels, and receiving information about breast cancer, self-examination or mammography from any of a variety of sources (particularly physicians) was found to be positively related to participation rates in BCS activities.

Coinciding with this study was the launch of the National Cancer Strategy in May 2011. The five-year campaign from 2011-2016 had the ultimate goal of significantly reducing the burden of cancer in the State of Qatar and to strive to provide cancer care at a standard of excellence, that stands out to the Gulf region and further afield.

Specifically, with regards to breast cancer, the National Cancer Strategy Review 2011-2016 points to several campaigns and initiatives that have been successful in raising breast cancer awareness, and increasing the number of breast cancer screenings (whether clinical or self-examinations). The breast cancer awareness campaign, “It’s your time to care, be breast aware” focused on increasing public awareness and education of the importance of early detection of breast cancer by setting up information booths positioned in public spaces and malls to spread their message.

In addition to this, screening programs were launched at primary health care centres across Qatar in 2016 which dramatically saw the increase in patients proactively registering for screening.

The next step in comprehensive cancer treatment is linked to mental and social support for cancer patients. For those suffering from the illness, psychosocial support seems to be a key



in successful treatment and recovery. An article found in the Qatar Medical Journal (QMJ) titled, “**Evaluating psychosocial support needs of female cancer patients in the State of Qatar,**” used questionnaires to determine how important support is to female cancer patients. The study defined psychosocial support as family support, religious/spiritual support, support groups, and physician-referred support. It found that a cancer diagnosis can have a wide range of stressful mental and social implications and if these implications are left untreated, it has been shown to have negative effects on treatment compliance and recovery. The study concludes that this type of psychosocial support is becoming increasingly important in holistic cancer care and it provides new information that highlights possible areas of future research and development.

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