

Role of Women in Controlling Breast Cancer



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According to the United Nations estimates in 2008, millions of human lives including men, women and children were lost very year because of cancer predominantly affecting the lungs, stomach, liver, colon, and the breast. Women have largely been found to be suffering from the cancer of the breast, cervical, uterus and the kidney. The developed countries in Europe, America and the Pacific regions have identified the risk factors in the incidence of cancer as those of tobacco use, obesity, unhealthy diet (with low fruit and vegetable intake), lack of physical activity, alcohol consumption, sexually transmitted HPV infection, urban air pollution and indoor smoke from household use of solid fuel. Many of the developed countries have therefore comprehensively drafted plans to reduce the incidence of cancer and identify the affected persons for effective control and treatment.

In India I noticed that among the six married sisters in a large family three of them suffered with breast cancer. Chandra was diagnosed of breast cancer in its advance stage in the year 1970 when she was 42 years of age and was leading a happily married life with four children --three young daughters and a son. She underwent radical mastectomy followed by a course of radiotherapy and chemotherapy. Subsequently her liver was affected and she expired at the age of 44.

The youngest of the six sisters Uma married in the year 1960, had two sons and was living anormal happily married life in New Delhi when one day she felt a lump in her left breast without any feeling of discomfort or pain and in good faith showed it to her husband who was associated with radio broad casts of health and family planning programmes. Uma's husband did not leave the things there. He strongly believed in "Do not put off till tomorrow what you can do today". He took his wife to the residence of a friendly doctor couple – husband being a surgeon and wife a gynaecologist. On examining Uma they advised for specialised consultation. An oncologist surgeon was accordingly consulted the next day in one of the major hospitals. As per his advice syringe biopsy was done and was followed by the surgical removal of the malignant lump. The surgeon without any loss of time advised and performed the radical mastectomy by removing the left breast.

Since Uma had not reached her menopause he advised and surgically removed the two ovaries to check the growth of cancerous cells. These operations were followed by courses of radiotherapy and chemotherapy. Uma normalised her life after 8 weeks and continued to work in the education department with full support of her husband and other members of the family .She did face the side effects of falling hair, raised sugar level and blood pressure. She continued to live a satisfactory life for 16 years after her cancer detection and died of heart attack in the year 1997 at the age of 65.

The third sister among the six of them, Krishna suffered from breast cancer in the year 1990 when she was 60 years in age. She also underwent radical mastectomy, survived for two years and expired in the year 1992. All breast cancers are not the same. Their type and stage can differ and so the course of treatment. Regretfully it may be pointed out that the three sisters could not undertake the BRCA 1 or BRCA II tests to confirm the genetic faults and thus the 50% of their chance of passing the cancerous genes to the next generation.

A closer look at the above three sisters in our extended family has indicated that breast cancer can occur at any age—it may be 40 or 60 married or unmarried , early detection followed by surgery and a course of radiotherapy and chemotherapy with appropriate medication along with suitable psychological support is not only important but very essential.

Over a period of last 30 years substantial changes have taken place in the process of diagnosis, techniques of surgery and courses of radiotherapy and chemotherapy. In Australia many such facilities have been provided free of cost to the permanent residents and the Australian citizen. Women have therefore a positive role to play for safeguarding themselves and educating others in doing so.

Discuss Freely. The subject of breast cancer, its diagnosis, treatment facilities and psychological support should be freely discussed with patients, among relations, friends and neighbours with procurement of written material and video presentations to strength the knowledge and experience as also acquire the needed skill. All

women are advised to take part in the meetings as a participant , speaker, donor or a fund raiser in support of the cause .and share the gravity of the situation with the suffering families.

Self-Examination: Women of all ages should learn to bodily examine their breast regularly each month two to three days after the end of their periods and on specific monthly dates in case of women reaching the menopause irrespective of their marital status. The Sydney Breast Cancer Foundation has advised following steps for self-check-up.

Step 1: The Shower Check

Place your left hand behind your head and use your right hand politely and gently rotating it around all areas of your left breast clockwise and then anticlockwise to identify anything unusual and soft. Repeat this process to locate under pressure of your fingers any spot which is hard or knot like. Repeat this process to examine your right breast with your left hand.

Step 2: The Mirror Check

After showering place your two hands each on the respective sides and minutely watch your breast to identify changes in colour, size or shape, any dimpling of the skin or "pulling in" of the nipple. Next put your hands on your hips and push your shoulders forward to flex your chest muscles. Finally raise your hands over your head and check for any changes.

Step 3: Check Lying Down

Lie back with your knees bent. Roll your shoulders back to place them flat on the bed. Place your left arm under your head. Examine your left breast with your right hand in its clockwise and then anticlockwise rotation. Repeat the process to examine your right breast with the left hand rotation.

Step 4: Continue yourself examination and thereafter consult your G.P for regular mammogram screening to confirm the state of your health. You may not have anything doubtful but you are advised to undergo this test regularly once in two years. Follow the advice of the doctor if anything adverse is detected. Never think of delaying these matters come what may.