

Population-wide Breast Screening Introduced in 34 Countries

HKBCF Advocates Screening Programme in Hong Kong; Early Detection Saves Lives!

(14 April 2013. HONG KONG) The Hong Kong Breast Cancer Foundation (HKBCF) organised a seminar today entitled “Updates on Early Detection of Breast Cancer”. Speakers included Legislative Councillor, HKBCF Honorary Advisor and breast cancer survivor Ms. Chan Yuen-han; Dr. Polly Cheung, Founder of HKBCF; and five other medical specialists. Ms. Candy Kuan, a breast cancer survivor who has written to the Hong Kong SAR Government petitioning a population-wide breast cancer screening programme, also shared her experience. Attendees of the seminar expressed expectations for the Government to raise public awareness of breast cancer, also suggesting it to step up breast health services and facilities in the community and to undertake a feasibility study to gauge if Hong Kong should introduce a population-wide breast screening programme.

Breast Cancer: the Most Common Cancer Among Women in Hong Kong

Dr. Polly Cheung together with five medical specialists announced the latest facts and figures on breast cancer compiled both locally and worldwide. The incidence of female breast cancer in Hong Kong has tripled in the past 20 years, with the disease being the most common cancer affecting Hong Kong women. Breast cancer is the third leading cause of death among women dying from cancer. In Hong Kong, one in 19 women would have breast cancer in her lifetime.

Dr. Cheung said: “Thirty-four countries have already introduced population-wide breast cancer screening programmes. Among them are Hong Kong’s neighbours including Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and the Mainland China. The majority of the countries recommend screening once every two years. The global figures also indicate that out of 1,000 women, three to nine are detected with breast cancer, with an average detection rate of 0.5%. Early detection through the screening programmes has led to a 20% to 38% reduction in mortality.”

Hong Kong has no population-based breast screening programme. Women who wish to take mammography screening would be doing so at screening centres out of their

own initiative. Among the 1.5 million women who are the most eligible for screening (aged 40-69), only 5% have developed a screening habit.

Early Detection Reduces Death Rate

Professor Josette Chor Sin-yee, Assistant Professor of the School of Public Health at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, said that a successful population-wide health screening programme helps increase life expectancy and improve quality of life. Early detection and diagnosis lower the need for a patient to receive aggressive treatment and reduces the harm to body and mind for both the patients and care givers.

Mammography screening is the most widely used technology in breast screening around the world. According to Dr. Gladys Lo, Radiologist In-Charge of the Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital, mammograms cannot be replaced by ultrasound or Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), but has been proven to reduce mortality rate by 26% to 30%.

"I could have kept my breast", petitioned a Breast Cancer Survivor

Ms. Candy Kuan, a breast cancer survivor, recently petitioned the Government and shared her experience at the seminar. "I had never heard about mammography screening before I was diagnosed. If the Government had provided education to the public on the correct and effective ways of breast screening, I could have detected the disease earlier and avoided mastectomy. I could have kept my breast."

The Need to Increase Public Awareness

According to Dr. Hung Wai-ka, Honorary Medical Advisor at the HKBCF Breast Health Centre, a community-based facility established in May 2011, with funding support from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust.

Since its inception, the Centre has provided breast screening to about 10,000 women, among whom 26% already showed symptoms at the time of screening. The Centre also offers free screening service to participants from low income families, accounting for 41% of the total number of clients served to date. So far, 165 breast cancer cases were detected, yielding a cancer detection rate of 1.7%. The detection rate of breast cancer from asymptomatic cases and symptomatic cases were 0.6% (similar to overseas figures) and 5% respectively. It is evident that breast cancer is

prevalent in Hong Kong and that there is a strong demand for community-based breast health services.

Kwong Wah Hospital introduced mammography screening as early as 1993, said Dr. Eliza Fung, the hospital's Specialist in Radiology. The number of women being screened increased from 3,163 in 1993 to 18,781 in 2011.

The women who took mammograms at the Kwong Wah Hospital showed no symptoms of breast cancer; so far 1,068 breast cancer cases have been detected. Among the patients being diagnosed of breast cancer, 81.5% are in the early stages (stages 0-1). The figure is in line with worldwide trends.

Dr. Bonita Law, Director of Breast Centre of Union Hospital, said that women should have the right to be informed of the pros and cons of breast cancer screening. Sufficient screening centres should be available in the community to cater to the needs of the female population in Hong Kong.

Among the participants of the seminar were representatives of the Department of Health; the Chairperson of the Women's Commission Mrs. Stella Lau; Legislative Councillor Dr. Elizabeth Quat; former Chief Executive of the Consumer Council Ms. Connie Lau; district councillors; representatives of women groups, community organisations, hospitals and pharmaceutical companies, as well as academics and members of the general public. A lively discussion ensued following the presentations.

Photo captions:

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HKBCF Honorary Advisor & Legislator Ms. Chan Yuen-han delivering the opening speech.

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Ms. Connie Lau, former Chief Executive of the Consumer Council, believes that breast screening helps save health care costs in the long run, and that women should have the choice of whether or not to go for breast cancer screening after being informed of its pros and cons.

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Legislative Councillor Dr. Elizabeth Quat (first row, third right) urges the Government to promote breast screening and increase public awareness.

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Breast cancer survivor Candy Kuan asks why the Government does not promote awareness of breast cancer screening in Hong Kong.

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Speakers (from left to right)

Dr. Polly CHEUNG, Founder, Hong Kong Breast Cancer Foundation

Dr. Gladys LO, Radiologist In-Charge, Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital

Dr. Eliza FUNG, Specialist in Radiology, Kwong Wah Hospital

Dr. HUNG Wai-ka, Medical Consultant, HKBCF Breast Health Centre

Dr. Bonita LAW, Director of Breast Centre, Union Hospital

Prof. Josette CHOR Sin-ye, Assistant Professor, School of Public Health, CUHK

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