



## REGULAR MAMMOGRAM SCENING REDUCES THE NEED FOR TOTAL MASTECTOMY AND CHEMOTHERAPY

### Hong Kong Breast Cancer Foundation Urges Women Aged 40 or Above to Have Regular Screening Every Two Years

**(HONG KONG – 29 September 2013)** The latest statistics of the Hong Kong Breast Cancer Registry (BCR) initiated by the Hong Kong Breast Cancer Foundation (HKBCF) show that breast cancer tumors detected through regular screening are generally smaller and at earlier stages of development. The chances of a total mastectomy and/or chemotherapy are also lower.

Today HKBCF launched the *Hong Kong Breast Cancer Registry Report No. 5*, the most comprehensive and representative registry on breast cancer in Hong Kong, with data, lifestyle and medical history analysis of 9,804 breast cancer patients in Hong Kong.

The report shows that:

- 85% of breast cancers are self-detected by chance
- Aged 40-59 is the highest breast cancer incidence group in Hong Kong
- More than 80% of patients are exposed to two or more risk factors
- The majority of patients are lacking exercise (75.6%) and have never breastfed (65.4%)
- The majority of breast cancers are not inherited

At first diagnosis, most patients (84%) are diagnosed with invasive breast cancer. Patients with invasive breast cancer have a higher chance of requiring total mastectomy, lymph node surgery and chemotherapy. It also demonstrates that most women in Hong Kong have yet to start regular mammogram screening. Among women aged 40-59, the highest breast cancer incidence group in Hong Kong, only one in five (22%) had undertaken regular mammogram screening.

Dr Polly Cheung, Chairman of the Hong Kong BCR Steering Committee, stated that Hong Kong breast cancer patients tend to be diagnosed at a younger age than those overseas. The median age of diagnosis is 49, compared to that of the USA which is 61 and Australia which is 62. When comparing the proportion of patients who are diagnosed at age 30 to 39, Hong Kong has 12% of patients belonging to this age group, which is 2 to 3 times higher than the USA (4%) and Australia (5%). 40% of breast cancer cases in Hong Kong are diagnosed at the ages of 40-49, compared to less than 20% in the US and Australia. Also, Hong Kong patients tend to be diagnosed at a later stage of breast cancer.

Dr Cheung urged women aged 40 and above to proactively and regularly undertake a mammogram screening. She said, "Early detection can reduce the chance of the development of invasive carcinoma. The tumor is usually smaller and the disease at its relatively earlier stage. Regular mammograms can significantly increase the chance of early detection of in situ cancer.



This can reduce the breast cancer death rate, and the physical and mental suffering associated with the treatment for advanced stage cancer.”

The *Hong Kong Breast Cancer Registry Report No. 5* specifically compared the breast cancer characteristics and treatment of two patient cohorts aged 40 or above. The groups include:

1. Patients who do not have symptoms when breast cancer is detected through regular mammograms (regular screening group)
  2. Those who are examined and are diagnosed with breast cancer after presenting symptoms (post symptoms presented screening group)
1. Regular screening helps detection of non-invasive tumour (in situ cancer or 0 stage)  
The report states that 40% of cases in the regular screening group are in situ cancer, compared to the rate of 8% in the post symptoms presented screening group, meaning the rate is nearly five times higher in the regular screening group. In situ cancer is an early stage breast cancer. The carcinoma has yet to advance to the deeper tissue of the breast or spread to other organs. Treatment outcome and recovery from breast cancer at this stage are better.
  2. Regular screening helps early treatment when the tumor is relatively smaller  
The tumor size found in the regular screening group is smaller than that in the post symptoms presented screening group, with an average diameter of 1.3 cm (approximately the size of a 10 cents coin) and 2.3 cm (size of a one dollar coin), respectively. The smaller the tumor, the less breast tissue needs to be removed and the quicker the recovery.
  3. Regular screening helps reduce the risk of total mastectomy  
Less than half (46%) of patients in the regular screening group received a total mastectomy, while two-thirds (67%) of those in the post symptoms presented screening group received this surgery, a 21 percentage points higher than the regular screening group. Total mastectomy may affect a patient’s sense of balance. It can have a devastating effect on a patient’s emotions and affect their daily living. Regular screening can detect breast cancer at an earlier stage, dramatically reducing the likelihood of requiring a total mastectomy.
  4. Regular screening helps reduce the need for chemotherapy  
There are significantly more patients in the post symptoms presented screening group (66%) who require chemotherapy, compared to the group which has regular screening (25%). The chemotherapy medicine enters the bloodstream and goes to all parts of the body. It destroys the breast cancer cells by interfering with their ability to grow and divide. Chemotherapy cannot differentiate between breast cancer cells and healthy cells within the body. These cells include those in the lining of the mouth, the bone marrow, the hair follicles and the digestive system. This may cause temporary unpleasant side effects, including vomiting, loss of appetite and hair loss, etc.

“The *Hong Kong Breast Cancer Registry Report No. 5* indicates that 78% of breast cancer patients aged 40 or above do not have regular examinations and are diagnosed with breast cancer after presenting symptoms. Therefore, they miss the opportunity for treatment when the disease is at



its early stage. This explains as many as two-third (67%) patients require total mastectomy and 66% require chemotherapy. On the other hand, among those who are aged 40 or above but undertake regular examinations, less than half of them (46%) require total mastectomy and only one-fourth of them (25%) requires chemotherapy. I hope more women will be more alert about breast cancer, making the smart choice and undergoing regular screening to reduce the need for total mastectomy and chemotherapy,” says Dr Lawrence Li, member of the Hong Kong BCR Steering Committee.

The *Hong Kong Breast Cancer Registry Report No. 5* explores the physical and psychosocial impact of breast cancer on patients. The report states that over half of the patients have negative emotions upon diagnosis. It is also common for chemotherapy patients to experience severe discomfort from treatment.

Mrs Eliza Fok, Chairman of HKBCF, shared the importance of regular mammogram screening from the perspective of a breast cancer survivor. “Women may feel discomfort during a mammogram, as their breast has to be pressed during the process. But I can tell all women for sure that the suffering during the breast cancer treatment and the treatment side effects are far worse than that. Regular mammogram screening may bring some insignificant inconvenience to women. And financially speaking, the treatment cost of advanced stage cancer is far more expensive than the mammogram every two years. Women must understand the real threat of breast cancer and work to maintain good breast health,” she said.

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### **About Hong Kong Breast Cancer Registry (BRC)**

The Hong Kong BCR was established in 2007 by the Hong Kong Breast Cancer Foundation as the most comprehensive and representative registry on breast cancer in Hong Kong. The registry aims to collect data from all local breast cancer cases, including risk exposures, clinical examination, treatments, clinical outcomes and survival rates. The research and analysis will allow patients, medical professionals and public health policy makers to gauge local breast cancer facts, leading to improved prevention, detection, treatment and care of those suffering from the disease. To date, the data of 11,393 breast cancer patients and survivors has been included in the registry. A total of 35 hospitals and clinics are involved in the data collection. For further information, or to participate in or donate to the Hong Kong BCR, please visit: [www.hkbcf.org/breastcancerregistry](http://www.hkbcf.org/breastcancerregistry).

### **About HKBCF**

The HKBCF, founded on 8 March 2005, is the first non-profit charitable organization dedicated to eliminating the threat of breast cancer to the local community through education, support, reach and advocacy. The missions of HKBCF are: to promote public awareness of breast cancer and the importance of breast health; to support breast cancer patients on their road to recovery; and to advocate better breast cancer care in Hong Kong.



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