

Data Sheet

Breast Cancer in Hong Kong

Breast cancer is the most common cancer facing women around the world and an important public health issue. Over the past 10 years, the breast cancer incidence rate has continued to rise in North America and climbed in Asia. Regionally, Hong Kong's incidence rate has increased and is one of the highest.

- Breast cancer is number one cancer facing HK women.
- Over the past 25 years, diagnosed cases increased more than 2 times.
- One in every 14 women develops invasive breast cancer in her lifetime.
- If DCIS breast cancer is factored in, 1 in 12 women develops breast cancer in her lifetime.
- On average, 14 women are diagnosed with breast cancer every day.
- About 14 women dies from breast cancer every week on average.
- In 2020, 4,956 women and 32 men were diagnosed with breast cancer.
- The median age of local patients is 58, much younger than 63 and 62.8 in the USA and Australia respectively.
- Over 94% of breast cancer patients are over 40 years of age. The older, the higher the risk.

Source: Female breast cancer in 2020, Hong Kong Cancer Registry, Hospital Authority

Establishment of the Hong Kong Breast Cancer Foundation

Hong Kong Breast Cancer Foundation (HKBCF) was founded on 8 March 2005 by Dr Polly Cheung and Mrs. Eliza Fok together with a group of patients, doctors and friends who share a common goal to mitigate the threat of breast cancer to the local community. HKBCF is the first NGO focusing on breast health education, patient support, research and advocacy.

Our Work

1. Breast Health Centre

Breast Health Centre (BHC) was set up in May 2011 to provide paid and free breast cancer risk assessment, breast health examinations, doctor consultation services and diagnostic procedures. To date, it has served an attendance of 146,839. Through providing mammography and ultrasound examinations for 103,456 times, 2,228 people (aged between 23 and 89) have been diagnosed with breast cancer. The overall detection rate is 2.55% and for asymptomatic cases is 0.72%, which is on par with the worldwide standard. BHC has also provided free screening for 56,398 attendances which are under financial difficulties. Among them, 851 people have been diagnosed with breast cancer.

BHC launched the first-in-Hong-Kong breast cancer risk assessment service, which is on par with international standards, to help women understand their risks and encourage them to take preventive measures accordingly. BHC also holds educational talks regularly and provides onsite clinical breast examinations. To date, 120,636 people have attended the talks on breast health and breast cancer prevention through our services.

2. Breast Cancer Support Centre

Breast Cancer Support Centre (BCSC) provides individual and group counseling for breast cancer patients, their families and carers, pre- and post-treatment information sessions, monthly educational talks, lymphoedema care services, Traditional Chinese Medicine services, drug financial assistance programme, free wig programme, free bra, free bandage and comfort packs, as well as interest classes and group activities serving 11,731 patients. To date, BCSC has served patients (aged between 20 and 93) over 261,175 times.

HKBCF is the first charitable organisation in Hong Kong to provide lymphoedema index measurement services. Since October 2010, we have provided lymphoedema care services, including lymphoedema index measurement and individual lymphoedema treatments with 66,692 attendances. In addition, our drug financial assistance programme has helped reduce financial burden for 287 eligible patients, with accumulated financial assistance totaling over HK\$ 9,124,552. Since March 2012, we have provided free wig, prosthetic bra, and bandage to 400 patients. Since 2019, our gene testing financial assistance programme has subsidised 162 low-income patients, with accumulated subsidy totalling HK\$3,439,380.

3. Breast Cancer Research Centre

During its inception, the HKBCF built a dedicated registry, the Hong Kong Breast Cancer Registry (HKBCR) to capture the data of local breast cancer patients for developing treatment options and healthcare policies best suited to the local situation. In 2017, the HKBCF decided to name its research unit the Breast Cancer Research Centre (BCRC). Expanded in size and scope of research, BCRC will continue to collect data and provide analyses on breast cancer status and phenomenon, and to collaborate with other research agencies/institutions on breast cancer studies.

Steered by a committee comprised of medical, legal, managerial and public health professionals and representatives of breast cancer patients, HKBCR is a member of the International Association of Cancer Registries (IACR). It has registered 25,917 patients / survivors (aged 18-103), through 65 public hospitals, private hospitals and clinics.

HKBCR has published 14 annual reports presenting local breast cancer data and analysis. Highlights of each report:

- Report No. 1 (2009):** Revealed the common risk factors for breast cancer in Hong Kong.
- Report No. 2 (2010):** Private hospitals found higher ratio of early stage breast cancer.
- Report No. 3 (2011):** Lower income districts recorded higher rate of advanced stage breast cancer and lower screening rate.
- Report No. 4 (2012):** Unhealthy lifestyle prevails in young breast cancer patients.
- Report No. 5 (2013):** Regular mammography reduces need for mastectomy and chemotherapy.
- Report No. 6 (2014):** Low-skilled and widowed patients tend to delay medical consultation.
- Report No. 7 (2015):** Sentinel lymph node biopsy causes less invasive surgery and less side effects for early-stage breast cancer patients.
- Report No. 8 (2016):** Elders with breast cancer tend to delay seeking medical care and have later cancer stage.
- Report No. 9 (2017):** Neoadjuvant chemotherapy reduces tumour size & need for mastectomy.
- Report No. 10 (2018):** Fight breast cancer: Act NOW to reduce risk and introduce screening scheme
- Report No. 11 (2019):** A 12-year study showed regular screening and precision medicine are key to recovery.
- Report No. 12 (2020):** Mammography performed with ultrasound boosts detection accuracy
- Report No. 13 (2021):** Use of Positron Emission Tomography (PET) local practice utilisation in preoperative staging of breast cancer
- Report No. 14 (2022):** 10-year survival analysis of Chinese breast cancer patients in Hong Kong

Early Detection Saves Lives

Globally 34 advanced and developing countries are promoting public screenings for breast cancer, including mainland China, Japan, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan. Early detection of breast cancer can lower mortality rate. One study indicates that universal biennial mammography was the most effective strategy for detecting breast cancer early and achieved in a 40% reduction in mortality rate through reduction in stage II or above breast cancer cases.¹ However, no significant mortality reduction was seen in risk-based mammography.¹

HKBCF suggests women over 40 follow a three-step breast health examination routine:

Monthly breast self-examination

Biennial clinical breast health examination

Biennial mammogram

Early Detection Saves Lives - early stage breast cancer has a close to 100% survival rate and renders less complicated treatment, lesser need for chemotherapy, lesser trauma to the patient and lower medical costs.

HKBCF research found that among the over 40 age-group diagnosed in breast cancer invasive tumours detected through regular asymptomatic screening (1.3cm in diameter) are generally smaller than those found by symptomatic screening (2.3cm in diameter).^{*} About 80% of the breast cancers detected through regular screening were early stages (0 & I), while late staged cancers (III & IV) were found more by self-detection (17%) than regular screening (4%).²

Unfortunately, according to HKBCF survey, 80% of women were aware of the importance of breast cancer screenings yet only 20% underwent regular screenings.³ In addition, screenings were less common among women of lower income background with less education.⁴

^{*}Source:

1 Yen AM et al. *JAMA Oncol.* 2016;2(7):915-921.

2 HKBCR Bulletin April 2013 Issue4

3 HKBCF: survey report on perceptions&awareness of breast cancer screening in Hong Kong Women

4 HK Breast Cancer Registry Report No.14

Milestones

2005

- ✂ Inauguration of the HKBCF on 8 March
- ✂ Start of patient support services and breast cancer educational talks
- ✂ The first Pink Walk for Breast Health

2006

- ✂ Released survey results on Hong Kong women's perception and awareness of breast cancer examination

2007

- ✂ Co-organised the Breast Cancer Conference with The Hong Kong Cancer Institute, CUHK
- ✂ Established the HKBCR

2008

- ✂ Launched the Free Mammography Screening Programme

2009

- ✂ Launched the Breast Cancer Drug Financial Assistance Programme
- ✂ Office relocated to Fortress Hill
- ✂ Published HKBCR Report No. 1

2010

- ✂ Launched lymphoedema care services
- ✂ Launched young patient (< 40) support group

2011

- ✂ Opened the BHC

2012

- ✂ Organised the first Survivorship Camp
- ✂ Organised seminars on upper lymphoedema care and education

2013

- ✂ Organised seminar on "Updates on Early Detection of Breast Cancer"
- ✂ Declared May as the Month of Breast Cancer Survivorship
- ✂ Launched the first-in-Hong Kong breast cancer risk assessment service

2014

- ✂ Launched Breast Cancer HK Online, Hong Kong's first breast cancer online database for medical professional to access the data collected by the HKBCR

2015

- ✂ Launched 10th Anniversary Campaign to raise awareness of breast cancer risks
- ✂ Was granted a piece of land by HK government on a short-term tenancy agreement to establish Kowloon Centre

2016

- ✂ The groundbreaking of HKBCF Jockey Club Breast Health Centre (Kowloon)

2017

- ✂ BHC in North Point underwent renovation and procurement of new equipment, having funded by the HSBC 150th Anniversary Charity Programme

2018

- ✂ Officially opened HKBCF Jockey Club Breast Health Centre (Kowloon)

2019

- ✂ Rolled out Breast Awareness Campaign
- ✂ Lobbied the Government to Implement Population-wide Breast Screening
- ✂ Rolled out Hong Kong's First Lymphoedema Training Course

2020

- ✂ Launched 15th Anniversary Live Symposium on Breast Health Education to raise awareness of breast health and risk of breast cancer
- ✂ Government's Policy Address 2020 announced that the Department of Health will provide breast cancer screening for eligible women having regard to their breast cancer risk

2021

- ✂ The first Traditional Chinese Medicine Clinic was launched in April
- ✂ After years of advocacy by the HKBCF, the HKSAR Government launched the risk-based "Breast Cancer Screening Pilot Programme" in September

High Risk Factors

1. Lack of exercise (< 3 hours per week)
2. No breastfeeding
3. Overweight or obese
4. High level of stress (> 50% of time)
5. No childbirth or first live birth after age 35
6. Family history of breast cancer
7. Diet rich in meat or dairy products
8. Early menarche (< 12 years old)
9. Drinking alcohol
10. Use of hormonal replacement therapy

Source: HK Breast Cancer Registry Report No.14

Symptoms of Breast Cancer

- Painless Lump in breast
- Pitting on the skin (looks like orange peel)
- Dimpling in the breast
- Nipple turns inward into the breast
- Discharge / bleeding from the nipple
- A lump / enlarged lymph node in the underarm

Most often, these changes may not be caused by cancer. Still, a woman should see her doctor about any unusual changes in her breast.

Source: HKBCF Passport to Breast Health

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HKBCF is a registered charitable organisation (IRD File No.: 91/7226).