

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 drop in North America but climbed in Asia. Regionally, Hong Kong's incidence rate has tripled in the last twenty years and is one of the highest.

- Breast cancer is number one cancer facing HK women.
- Over the past 20 years, diagnosed cases almost tripled.
- One in every 15 women develops breast cancer in her lifetime.
- On average, 12 women are diagnosed every day.
- About 14 women dies from breast cancer every week on average.
- In 2017, 4,373 women and 18 men were diagnosed with breast cancer.
- The median age of local patients is 57, much younger than 62 and 60 in the USA and Australia respectively.
- Over 93% of breast cancer patients are over 40 years of age. The older, the higher the risk.

Source: 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 a group of patients, doctors and friends who share a common goal to mitigate the threat of breast cancer to the local community by establishing 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, and has served an attendance of 84,121 to date. Through providing mammography and ultrasound examinations for 59,872 times, 1,570 people (aged between 25 and 89) have been diagnosed with breast cancer. The overall detection rate is 2.59% and for asymptomatic cases is 0.72%, which is on par with the worldwide standard. BHC has also provided free screening for 35,490 attendance having financial difficulties. Among them, 603 people have been diagnosed with breast cancer.

The Department of Health says evidence shows that breast cancer screenings help women with high risk. 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, 97,413 people have been educated about 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, drug financial assistance programme, free wig programme, free bra, free bandage and comfort packs, as well as interest classes and group activities serving 9,038 patients. To date, BCSC has served patients aged between 20 and 93 over 173,506 times.

HKBCF is the first charitable organisation in Hong Kong to provide lymphoedema index measurement services. Since October 2010, we have provided 22,319 times of such services for 4,754 patients and survivors. In addition, our drug financial assistance programme has helped reduce financial burden for 276 eligible patients, with accumulated financial assistance totaling over HK\$8,802,169. Since March 2012, we have provided free wig, prosthetic bra, and bandage assistance to 295 patients.

3. Breast Cancer Research Centre

When it was first founded, 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 23,880 patients / survivors (aged 18-101), over 1,800 new registrants yearly in average through 62 public hospitals, private hospitals and clinics, which is around 40% of all newly diagnosed cases in Hong Kong.

HKBCR has published 11 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 breast cancer screening rate.

Report No. 4 (2012): Unhealthy lifestyle prevails in young breast cancer patients.

Report No. 5 (2013): Regular mammogram screening reduces the need for total 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 present with a later cancer stage.

Report No. 9 (2017): Neoadjuvant chemotherapy reduces tumour size and 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.

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)

Essentiality of Early Detection

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. A study in Taiwan 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. However, no significant mortality reduction was seen in risk-based mammography.

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, breast cancer tumours detected through regular screening (1.3cm in diameter) are generally smaller than those found by post symptoms screening (2.3cm in diameter). * Close to 80% of the breast cancer detected through regular screening are early stage (Stages 0 & I), while those self-detected are predominantly Stage II (44%)*. The difference is also shown in the percentage of late stage cancer (Stages III & IV) discovered: 5% of the regular screening group compared with 18% of self-detected group**.

Unfortunately, according to HKBCF survey, 80% of women know about breast cancer screenings yet only 20% take action. Also, screenings are less common among women of lower income background with less education.

*Source: HK Breast Cancer Registry Report No.11

**Source: HK Breast Cancer Registry Report No.5

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.11

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).