

Financial Assistance and Community Programmes to Enhance Access to Free Breast Cancer Screening Service at its Breast Health Centre

(Hong Kong – 20 May 2012) A recent survey conducted by Hong Kong Breast Cancer Foundation's (HKBCF) Breast Health Centre has shown that the major reason (44%) why some women do not go for mammography screening is that they cannot afford it. The respondents were beneficiaries of the Center's Free Breast Cancer Screening Programme. [see Table 1].

The Breast Health Centre, which has been in service for a year, has responded by launching new initiatives to enhance the accessibility of free screening services to women with financial needs. The Centre is also organising more community programmes in districts with low household incomes to arouse awareness of the benefits of regular screening. The HKBCF calls on eligible women to take early detection measures against breast cancer- the No. 1 cancer disease for women in Hong Kong.

The HKBCF advocates women aged 40 or above to adopt a 3-Step Breast Cancer Screening Programme - Monthly Breast Self-Examination; Clinical Breast Examination and Mammography Screening in every two years. In May 2011, it introduced Hong Kong's first community-based Breast Health Centre to offer professional, affordable and timely breast cancer screening, diagnosis and follow-up services. The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust funds the establishment and operation for the first three years of the Centre, including fee waivers for services to be rendered to 5,000 women with financial needs.

Three Initiatives to Promote Free Breast Cancer Screening Programme

At today's press conference that marks the Breast Health Centre's first anniversary, **Mrs Eliza Fok, Chairman of HKBCF**, reported that the Centre has conducted about 4,900 breast cancer screenings over the past 12 months, reflecting a strong demand for such service in the community. One-third (about 1,400) of the service users are beneficiaries of the Free Breast Cancer Screening Programme and they are recipients of CSSA, the government's transport support, disability allowance or they are women from low-income families. In order to appeal to more participate in the Programme, the following initiatives are launched with immediate effect:

1. Relaxation of Means Test Assessment for Low-income Individuals

With immediate effect, the Breast Health Centre will relax the means test assessment procedure [see Table 2] by requiring applicants to submit for review their household income proof only for the past three months (previously six months). The assessment on the value of the total household assets will also be scrapped.

2. Provision of Transportation Allowance for Applicants in Need

Despite the fact that the screening service is free for eligible women, the transportation cost of commuting to the Centre in North Point seems to have posed another challenge for some

women. The Breast Health Centre will offer a maximum of HKD50 as transportation allowance for applicants in need under the Free Breast Cancer Screening Programme.

3. Partnership with Community Groups to Reach Out

The Breast Health Centre will partner with community groups to step up the promotion of the Free Breast Cancer Screening Programme in districts with lower average income such as Tin Shui Wai, Yuen Long, Tung Chung, Sham Shui Po and Kwun Tong. These partner organisations include the Hong Kong Family Welfare Society, Kowloon Women's Organisations Federation and Hong Kong Ladies Dynamic Association.

The Centre is also piloting on-site Clinical Breast Examination Service in local communities to provide added convenience and incentive for women to use its service. **Ms Emily Fong, the Centre's Senior Health Service Officer**, said that the trial initiative at Po Tat Estate, Kwun Tong, has received overwhelming response, "Many women place their family or work responsibilities before their own health. On-site Clinical Breast Examination Service attracts these women as it saves their time and traveling expense."

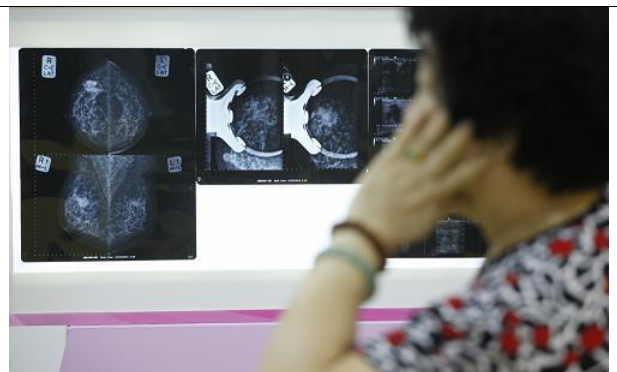
Mrs Fok called on all eligible women to look after themselves by joining the Free Breast Cancer Screening Programme, "If you love your family, love yourself first." She also appeals for support from community groups to broaden the assistance to those in need, "The HKBCF is keen and ready to arrange talks and work with our partners in the local communities. If they have difficulties coming to us, we shall go to them."

For enquiries, please ring Breast Health Centre on 3143 7333.

A Beneficiary's Story

Ms Chan, living in Kwun Tong, shared at the press conference how she benefited from the outreach initiative and the Free Breast Cancer Screening Programme.

"It helps indeed. I felt pains in my breast for two weeks but did not know how to deal with it until I attended the breast health talk in my neighbourhood last week. The BHC nurses came to do breast examination for me. She confirmed there was a lump in my breast and referred me for mammography, ultrasound and needle biopsy; all done in the following two days. And I received my final diagnosis within a week – it is a benign breast tumour!



She encourage women at appropriate age to have their breast health check. "Life is invaluable; early detection and early treatment of disease saves lives

"I feel so good and extremely relieved. I can't thank HKBCF enough for their flexible, effective service."

Mammography is a Key Part of Breast Cancer Screening

Dr Wong Chun-kuen, a radiologist and Convenor of the **Advisory Committee of the Breast Health Centre**, pointed out that the detection rate of 1.6% recorded at the Centre (16 breast cancer cases out of every 1,000 people screened) was much higher than the average detection rate of 0.5% seen in overseas countries. It reflects the low awareness of breast cancer screening among local women; some of whom hold a misconception that they should go for screening only when they feel lumps or find abnormalities in their breasts. Dr Wong warned, “most breast cancers are not painful and cannot be felt, even by a doctor. When a lump can be felt by the patient, it is very likely that there is stage II or even more advanced stage breast cancer.”

Dr Wong reiterated that mammography screening is the only screening modality which is proven to detect breast cancer early, before it can be felt. The potential radiation risk from a mammography screening every two years is very low (0.36 mSv), compared to the radiation dose one exposes to in everyday activities. Also the risk is far outweighed by the benefit of mammography in finding breast cancer early enough to save lives.

Also he quoted the findings of a survey conducted at the Centre that 95% of the users considered the pain of mammography screening acceptable. “Professional service often makes the difference,” commented Dr Wong. “All our (Breast Health Centre) partnering diagnostic centres have undergone stringent evaluation by a panel of medical professionals before they are so enlisted. Their services and equipment must be of high standard and all diagnostic centres have in-house radiologists who will examine mammography films taken immediately. This will ensure the prompt professional follow-up on abnormal or suspicious cases to minimise anxiety of service users.”

- End -



Mrs Eliza Fok, HKBCF Chairman and Dr Wong Chun Kuen, HKBCF Breast Health Centre Advisory Committee Convenor, call upon community groups and low-income women to fully utilise the free screening service and educational resources of the Breast Health Centre.

[Appendix]

Table 1: The Reasons Why Free Breast Cancer Screening Programme Users have not had mammograms before (200 respondents; more than one reason can be chosen)

Reasons	No. of Responses
Screening fee too high	93 (44%)
No abnormalities found on breast	34 (16%)
Not aware of available screening service	27 (13%)
No family history of breast cancer	21 (10%)
Not aware of mammography screening	12 (6%)

Table 2: Free Breast Cancer Screening Programme (effective from 20 May 2012)

Eligibility: aged 40 or above, Hong Kong ID card holder and has not received a mammography screening in the past 2 years

Category of Applicants		Assessment Criteria
1. CSSA recipients		Valid proof of the allowance
2. Work Incentive Transport Subsidy Scheme beneficiaries		
3. Disability Allowance recipients		
4. Low-income people (including working women and housewives)		Proof of household income of the past 3 months
No. of Family Member	Cap of Monthly Household Income (HK\$)	
1	9,000	
2	14,000	
3	16,000	
4	19,000	
5	22,000	
6	25,500	

Application form can be obtained:

- By Post:** Please provide a stamped return envelope with address and send to 21/F Jupiter Tower, 9 Jupiter Street, North Point, Hong Kong; quoting "Request for Application Form of Free Breast Cancer Screening Programme"
- Download from** www.hkbcf.org