

For Immediate Release

## **Hong Kong Breast Cancer Registry Report No. 7 Sentinel Lymph Node Biopsy: Less Invasive Surgery and Less Side Effects for Early-stage Breast Cancer Patients**

(23 September 2015) The latest research by Hong Kong Breast Cancer Registry (HKBCR) shows that an increasing use of sentinel lymph node biopsy in Hong Kong enabled women in the early stages of breast cancer to avoid axillary lymph node dissection. The biopsy can also help reduce post-operative side effects such as lymphoedema and thus significantly improve the patients' quality of life.

### Breast Cancer Registry: breast cancer risk factors are mostly modifiable

Hong Kong Breast Cancer Foundation (HKBCF) released the Hong Kong Breast Cancer Registry Report No. 7 today. The report has collected and analyzed the data of 14,400 breast cancer cases in Hong Kong.

HKBCF Founder, **Dr. Polly Cheung**, who is also Chairman of Hong Kong Breast Cancer Registry Steering Committee, said that medically, causes of breast cancer remain unknown but many studies have ascertained a number of factors that increase breast cancer risk. Based on data recently released by the Breast Cancer Registry, the four most common risk factors for breast cancer in Hong Kong are: lack of physical exercise, no breastfeeding, high level of stress and overweight/obesity. It is noteworthy that women can lower these risks through lifestyle modification. Dr. Cheung advised women to be aware of their risk factors while also encouraged them to change their lifestyles to lower their risk of developing breast cancer.

### The benefits of sentinel lymph node biopsy

The HKBCF also released at the press conference a report on the use of sentinel lymph node biopsy. First of its kind in Hong Kong, the research was conducted by examining data of 6,769 women diagnosed with breast cancer and received treatment between 2006 and 2012.

According to **Dr. Miranda Chan**, member of Breast Cancer Registry Steering Committee, and person-in-charge of the study, explained that conventional surgery removes tumors as well as lymph nodes located underarm or near the chest. Removal of lymph nodes aimed to prevent cancer cells from spreading from the breast via the lymph system. However, with fewer lymph nodes, there is an abnormal build-up of protein and lymph fluid in the soft tissues of the upper arm. This disrupts the normal flow in the lymphatic drainage system and inhibits the effective circulation of protein and fluid to the heart, often resulting in lymphoedema in upper arm. The more lymph nodes removed, the higher the risk of developing lymphoedema.

Sentinel lymph node biopsy has been practiced in Hong Kong since 2002. If upon clinical examination a patient's lymph nodes are not swollen or enlarged, the surgeon will remove a few sentinel lymph nodes for biopsy. If result of examination shows no cancer cells, which indicates that breast cancer has not spread in the remaining lymph nodes in the same basin, then removal of more lymph nodes would not be necessary. The study results have shown that the use of sentinel



lymph node biopsy among the surgeons and patients had increased between 2006 and 2012. In particular, the rates of using sentinel lymph node biopsy were as high as 70-80 percent among those diagnosed with early-stage breast cancer, negative lymph node involvement and tumor size smaller than 2 cm.

Sentinel lymph node biopsy is less invasive and reduces the need to remove lymph nodes in the underarm. The procedure reduces the side effects from surgery, such as lymphoedema on arm, reduced mobility of arm and numbness. Our study also shows that patients who have had sentinel lymph node biopsy suffer less discomfort after the procedure, compared with those who have undergone full lymph node dissection.

#### Managing lymphoedema by exercise

Lymphoedema may occur several months or even several years following the surgery. HKBCF has supported over 2,500 survivors with its lymphoedema care service over the past five years. Of the cases that have received lymphoedema index measurements at HKBCF, less among those who had undergone sentinel lymph node biopsy suffered from lymphoedema, compared to those who had had axillary lymph node dissection (7.2% vs 30.5%).

**Ms. Doris Cheung**, Senior Health Service Officer and Certified Lymphoedema Therapist at HKBCF Breast Cancer Support Centre, alerted breast cancer survivors of the risk of lymphoedema and the importance of preventing it. Survivors are highly recommended to measure their lymphoedema index before surgery and once every three months throughout the course of treatment as a preventive measure to detect early symptoms and monitor lymphoedema.

Patients diagnosed with lymphoedema are advised to enroll in HKBCF's Lymphoedema Basic Care Class as well as the Lymphoedema Management Group. In the class, patients can learn about self-manual lymphatic drainage, exercises for prevention, wearing pressure sleeve and tips of soothing and reducing discomfort caused by lymphoedema.

Madam Hung, who was present at the press conference, suffered from lymphoedema after axillary lymph node dissection. As a result she had swollen arm and found it difficult to lift her arm and suffered from pain associated with the lymphoedema. This brought much inconvenience to her daily life, especially when she had to do household chores in the kitchen. She then received lymphoedema care service at HKBCF. She practiced the lymphoedema exercise and wore pressure sleeve. Within a year, her situation improved and the reading of her lymphoedema index dropped from 110.3 to 34.3. Madam Hung said, "My lymphoedema and the discomfort resulting from the swelling have gone. I am no longer scared."

#### Act now for Breast Health

**Mrs. Eliza Fok**, Chairman of Hong Kong Breast Cancer Foundation (HKBCF) concluded that breast cancer remained the number one cancer affecting women in Hong Kong; one in every 17 women in Hong Kong may get breast cancer before the age of 75. The HKBCF has been advocating "Early Detection Saves Lives". According to data from the Breast Cancer Registry, the percentage of patients who never had breast screening was much higher in Kowloon and the New Territories than that of Hong Kong Island. In view of the situation, HKBCF is setting up a Kowloon service center in Ngau Chi Wan, hoping to provide such services as breast cancer screening, patient support service



and breast health education to women with high breast cancer risk who live or work in Kowloon and New Territories. HKBCF expects to start operation of Kowloon Center around end of 2016.

In addition, HKBCF has recently rolled out a new community-based public education campaign, "Breast Cancer Risk BINGO", which consists of advertising campaign and roving exhibitions. The initiative aims to promote public awareness of breast cancer and encourage women to take risk assessment and regular breast screening at HKBCF's Breast Health Centre. Those playing the online game on the campaign website on or before 3 November 2015 can enter a lucky draw. Sharing the game on Facebook and tag at least three friends will win one more chance to enter the lucky draw. Prizes include smartphones and free breast health screening.

Moreover, the annual walkathon Pink Walk for Breast Health will take place on 18 October this year. A special Off Peak Pink Walk arrangement has been introduced in a bid to break the time and location constraint – anyone can join the event by doing the walk on treadmill, on the way to and from work, in a park or whenever and wherever she/he likes. Off peak walkers are encouraged to raise funds for HKBCF by sumitting their walking log recorded on a device or any smartphone app. For details, please visit the HKBCF's Facebook. (End)

#### **The Hong Kong Breast Cancer Foundation ([www.hkbcf.org](http://www.hkbcf.org))**

The Hong Kong Breast Cancer Foundation was set up on 8 March 2005, as a non-profit charitable organisation dedicated to mitigating the threat of breast cancer to the local community through education, support and research & advocacy. Its mission is to promote public awareness of breast cancer and the importance of breast health; support breast cancer patients on their road to recovery and advocate better breast cancer care in Hong Kong.

#### **Hong Kong Breast Cancer Registry (HKBCR)**

HKBCR collects and analyzes population wide breast cancer data, as a means to offer insight of, and to support further research for more effective breast cancer prevention, treatment and breast healthcare solutions. It aims to empower those affected by breast cancer with information about local breast cancer and the treatment paths of fellow patients; to facilitate medical professionals' decision making process on the treatment and care of breast cancer patients, and to inspire policy changes for better prevention, detection, diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer and rehabilitation of patients.

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Photo captions:



Dr. Polly Cheung, Chairman and Dr. Miranda Chan, member of Hong Kong Breast Cancer Registry Steering Committee, together with Mrs. Eliza Fok released the seventh report of the Registry covering some 14,000 local breast cancer cases, and the study results on the use of sentinel lymph node biopsy in Hong Kong.



Madam Hung (center) has suffered from lymphedema since she got seven underarm lymph nodes removed in the breast cancer surgery. The swelling and discomfort has a negative impact on her everyday life. After receiving the Lymphoedema Care Service for a year at HKBCF, she is getting better, and the lymphedema index has dropped from 110 to 34.