

Thursday, 18 March 2004

14:15–15:45

## SYMPOSIUM

**Breast cancer – what follows?**

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INVITED

**The management of postmenopausal problems**

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Management of postmenopausal problems in breast cancer patients has become increasingly important since the event of – and widened indications for – adjuvant systemic therapies. These therapies may induce early menopause, increase the intensity and frequency of climacteric symptoms and lower natural estrogenic activity to a very low level. The intricate interaction between breast cancer treatments, hormones, biology of remaining breast cancer cells and postmenopausal problems further underlines the importance of that breast cancer specialists engage themselves in this problem area.

A "hot debate running on little data" (quoted from JNCI's news page) has been ongoing about the safety of hormonal replacement therapy (HRT) in breast cancer survivors. Observational studies have indicated safety – or even a beneficial effect – of HRT given to women with a previous breast cancer. However, in the observational studies confounding by indication is a threat to validity and several randomised studies started in the late 1990ies to address this question. As an alternative to HRT, acupuncture and antidepressants have been studied as treatments of climacteric symptoms. For treatment of osteoporosis there are several well-tested alternatives to HRT. Randomised studies in HRT given to women without breast cancer show that there is no hope to find positive effects on cardiovascular events that could outweigh an eventual harmful effect of HRT on breast cancer prognosis.

For long-term effects of tamoxifen a complicated pattern of both positive and negative effects on postmenopausal problems now emerges, tamoxifen being both an estrogen antagonist and agonist. However, the long-term consequences of aromatase inhibitors on postmenopausal problems are less well known.

Despite much public attention, there are few well-designed broad studies about patient's experiences and perceived needs in relation to postmenopausal problems after treatment for a breast cancer. Studies in this field probably need to be done in several different socio-cultural settings.

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INVITED

**Pro-active approaches (phytoestrogens, anti-oxidants & physical activities ...) – is there any evidence supporting a protective effect?**

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More than 50% of breast cancer survivors admit to use some kind of complementary and alternative medical treatments (CAM). Family and friends generally support the decision to use CAM, although CAM is predominantly prescribed by physicians. CAM is used more frequently in younger, well educated, and married professionals. According to CAM users, the objectives for these treatments are manifold: enhancement of the immune system (91%), reduction of treatment associated toxicities (61%), improvement of cancer-related symptoms (34%) and even a direct antineoplastic effect (42%). An array of different CAM is offered to patients. In Europe most frequently mistletoe, vitamins/minerals, herbal medicines, green tea, special foods, and homeopathic preparations (e.g. di Bella, Ukrain) are used. Most of these formulations are unknown or unpopular in Asia and North America. The primary basis of CAM rests on empirical observations and case studies, as well as theoretical physiologic effects. In some cases, laboratory or clinical data additionally support these treatment modalities. However, until today, we have no data from randomized placebo-controlled trials, demonstrating an improvement of disease free or overall survival in breast cancer patients by CAM. This is particularly true for mistletoe, vitamins or antioxidants. Exercise training had beneficial effects on cardiopulmonary function and QOL in postmenopausal breast cancer survivors, but did not have any impact on survival data. Furthermore there are no valid data confirming an improvement of quality of life (QOL) with CAM. Reported improvements of QOL due to CAM could be the result of healthy life-style behaviors (e.g. daily exercise, increased daily fruit & vegetable intake, stopping of risk factors) in selected breast cancer survivors. On the other hand, CAM may reduce the efficacy of conventional anticancer therapy (e.g. Vitamin E could inhibit apoptosis in tumor cell lines, lectine-induced cytochromes can stimulate tumor growth, viscum album-extracts are potentially capable to repair DNA-damages caused by toxic

substances) Use of CAM could result in delay in seeking medical advice for breast cancer. CAM use is more convenient than changing the lifestyle and is common among breast cancer survivors, who frequently discuss different options of CAM with their physicians. Therefore, the knowledge of CAM therapies is helpful for physicians in counselling patients to make informed choices.

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INVITED

**Women's view on follow-up**

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Follow-up after primary treatment for breast cancer is a routine procedure based on three assumptions, the first and most important being that early detection is valuable from a prognostic point of view. The second assumption is that patients get a sense of psychological security and satisfaction from being followed up, and the third that the routine check-ups aim at collecting data and are necessary for quality assurance. Much of the research examining current systems of follow-up care cast doubt on the effectiveness of the medical model and the use of routine investigations. Thus the regular frequent follow-up visits with routine diagnostic evaluation have not been considered appropriate and cost-effective because of the socio-economic burden.

To identify the expectations and experiences of women receiving follow-up after treatment for breast cancer a questionnaire was sent out to 1200 members of three different local breast cancer organizations within the Swedish Breast Cancer Association. The three local organizations represented different regions, one big town with suburbs, one smaller town with surrounding countryside and one a sparsely populated area in the very north of Sweden. The same questionnaire was distributed to the participants in a discussion forum on the internet. More than 600 questionnaires were filled in and returned to the Swedish Breast Cancer Association. The majority of the women preferred to go to a breast centre for the follow-up visits. On the other hand they indicated that the follow-up examinations were hurried, investigations were not reassuring and some reported a lack of continuity with different oncologists at each visit. Many women felt there was no opportunity to ask questions, express emotional concerns or talk about their social situation.

It is important that the follow-ups are changed to better meet patient's ongoing needs.

In Sweden and some other countries there are studies carried out to compare nurse-led with conventional medical follow-up visits. The growing number of women being diagnosed with breast cancer in combination with improved treatment increases the socio-economic burden of the disease. It is possible that advanced nursing intervention can result in increased patient satisfaction for women treated for breast cancer and in decreased cost for care. Before a transfer from the conventional medical routine follow-up visits to nurse-led check-up visits we call for more studies and trials in this field to provide evidence-based information.

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## SYMPOSIUM

**How to make the best use of limited resources**

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INVITED

**How does Egypt cope?**

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The Cairo Breast Screening Trial (CBST) was designed to evaluate the role of clinical breast examination (CBE) as a primary screening modality in the context of primary care. Although mammography is established as

a screening modality for women age 50–69, it is out of reach for many socially disadvantaged women in Egypt, and another approach has to be considered for the early detection of breast cancer. The CBST has therefore been designed to evaluate the role of clinical breast examination as a primary screening modality in the context of primary care. It is anticipated that early detection programmes based on primary care, coupled with the provision of adequate treatment for detected cases, could reduce both the morbidity and mortality from breast cancer.

An initial pilot phase of the CBST involving 4116 women has been completed. In that phase a specialised medical centre in Cairo (the Italian Hospital) was selected as the headquarters of the study. An area around the Italian Hospital was geographically defined. The initial target group was the approximately 5000 women age 35–64 living in this area. Maps of the area were obtained, and divided into blocks. Larger scale maps of each of the blocks were made. Trained social workers conducted door to door visits to the houses in the blocks allocated to them, and invited women in the relevant age group to participate in the study. Those 4116 women who agreed to participate were administered an initial enrolment questionnaire, and invited to attend a primary health centre for CBE. Those found abnormal were referred to the Italian Hospital for investigation and treatment. In the second year, cluster randomization was performed and half the women were re-contacted, and invited to attend for screening. In the third year, those not contacted in the second year were visited at home and their health status determined.

The pilot study confirmed that breast screening, using CBE by female doctors detects a high rate of breast cancer; about 8 per 1000 at the first examination and two per thousand among those who attended for re-screening. This suggests that a mortality benefit might be observed if a study with sufficient power proves feasible.

It became apparent, that a substantial segment of women in the community, are resistant to attempts to involve them in the whole process of screening. These women appear to comprise a high risk sub-group, on whom special surveillance and general public education efforts are justified. They have a prevalence of breast cancer at least as high as those who attend, while their delay in attending is probably contributing to advanced disease at diagnosis, completely the reverse of the compliant group. There are indications that as the project proceeded from Phase 1 to 2, there was increasing willingness in the community to participate. This is encouraging and initiation of screening in other districts should be seriously considered.

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INVITED

#### How does Ukraine cope?

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In Ukraine Breast Cancer (BC) is rated the highest among malignant tumour-related diseases. In Ukraine in 2002 year fall ill with BC 14 579 women. The incidence rates increased more than twice (2.27) within the last 10 years from 22.6 women per 100 000 population in 1986 to 56.4 in 2002. One of the most objective indicators is the rate of deaths within one year of diagnosis. In 2001 14% of women with diagnosed BC have died within one year. According to National Cancer Register in year 2002 only 12% of new cases were identified at stage I and 30.3% of new BC cases are still being identified in the late stages (III and IV).

Due to severe economic conditions of post soviet Ukraine and absence of the consecutive and effective policy in Health Care System reforming medical professionals face great challenges in providing basic primary health care, let alone early detection services and optimal clinical care for women with the disease. Within the last 10 years Screening mammography politics and programs were not developed and implemented. Ukraine has a big lack of the modern equipment. Less than 10% of functioning mammography machines counted in state sector were considered modern.

The treatment of BC is exercised mainly in the Oncological Clinics. The majority of patients receive complex treatment: surgery, radiation, chemotherapy and hormonal therapy. In 2002 specialised treatment was provided for 74.0% of patients with primarily diagnosed BC. Radical mastectomy (removal of the breast and regional lymphatic nodes) outweighs other surgical approaches. The reason lies in the later stages detection. Many surgeons in Ukraine are familiar with conservative surgery but it is often hardly realisable.

The critical situation with BC in Ukraine is further aggravated by the lack of chemotherapeutic medications. Although the State Program "Oncology 2002–2006" has provided near 15.8 million US dollars for the purchase of drugs to treat all cancer patients in Ukraine, but financing has really started in 2003 and not in full. This factor limits the possibility for a majority of women with BC to receive full medical treatment, as they can not afford to pay for the treatment themselves. As a result, BC contributes greatly to the high mortality rate among women in Ukraine.

Last year Europa Donna Ukraine/NGO Women Health and Family Planning created of the national Advocacy network "TOGETHER AGAINST CANCER" which promotes training of knowledgeable and experienced

activists, helps NGOs related to Health Care System, well-known public activists, doctors and women who had BC to initiate women rights advocacy, to launch medical prophylactics programs, to provide modern diagnostics opportunities, treatment, rehabilitation and social support of BC patients. Now this NGOs are successfully working in the field of BC Advocacy, implementation of European guidelines, information – educational programs on early diagnostics of BC, psychological and social support of patients with BC. As the results numerous nation-wide BC awareness and fundraising campaigns have been conducted in Ukraine. Services of psychological and social support of patients with BC were created on the basis of the Oncological Hospital in Kiev and some other cities of Ukraine.

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INVITED

#### How does South Africa cope?

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South Africa represents a typical middle-income developing country. This results in a dichotomy of breast cancer diagnosis and therapy provision between the 20% of the population that are health insured and the others that have to rely on the state for provision of care. For the health insured there is western standard breast cancer screening and therapy available. The further discussion is limited to the state sector. As is typical for this type of country, translation of medical progress into practice is uneven and has been marked in South Africa's case by stagnation/regression in the past 10 years. Factors are large-scale emigration of health professionals at all levels to other English speaking countries, redistribution of health resources to primary care to the detriment of the tertiary sector, equipment/medicine costs spiraling out of control with the currency devaluation, the challenge of AIDS and a national health care policy motivated by political rather than pragmatic decisionmaking. The result is that despite the commitment to women's and child health, a coherent screening policy, as formulated in 2000 by outside consultants for the National Department of Health, is still not noted on the web-site of the department, even less implemented. Mammography is largely limited to 7 tertiary hospitals, breast cancer treatment has stagnated at the level of 1990. This means, that newer drugs, notably aromatase inhibitors, taxanes, navelbine and trastuzumab are not available. Radiation equipment is outdated and break-downs are frequent. Waiting times for radiation in breast conservation are 4–6 months, for emergencies like spinal cord compression between 1 and 2 weeks. Surgery is usually readily available. On a continental level, Africa presents a mixed picture of emerging, submerging and failed countries. Failed countries will not be able to offer any meaningful breast cancer care. Elsewhere surgery is usually readily available. Progress is only possible if political pressure is exerted to shift priorities from luxuries such as defence to health care. Women empowerment in traditionally male dominated societies of Africa is necessary. Developed countries may play an important role by making aid and trade relationships depending on the political shift described and by a long-term commitment to partner institutions in Africa in breast health training and service.

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INVITED

#### How does Brazil cope?

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Breast cancer is a public health problem in Brazil. In 2003, more than 40,000 new women will be diagnosed with breast cancer, representing 24% of all malignancies in the female population and being the leading cause of cancer. Considering the global scenario, the incidence of breast cancer in Brazil is average, with 46 new cases per 100,000. More than 9000 women will die from breast cancer during this year. It is the number one cause of cancer death in Brazilian women. Brazil shares with other developing countries a non-age-corrected breast cancer incidence/mortality ratio of 0.39, as opposed to the ratio of 0.33 in the more developed world.

Brazil is a gigantic country with a population of 170,000,000. There is a wide variation in cancer incidence and mortality throughout the different areas. In the southern region, rates are closer to the ones found in North America as opposed to the north, where figures resemble those encountered in Africa.

Life expectancy has been increasing over the last decades in Brazil and, nowadays, a woman lives approximately 69 years. At the same time, a large portion of the population has moved from the rural to the urban areas. These figures may in part explain the increasing incidence and mortality observed throughout the recent decades. In the late seventies, breast cancer mortality was 8/100,000 and in the early 2000 it achieved almost 12/100,000.

A major limitation in terms of breast cancer control in Brazil relates to early detection. Thirty percent of women with breast cancer in Brazil still present with locally advanced breast cancer. There is a large room for