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WHO LAUNCHES NEW ROADMAP ON BREAST CANCER

Breast cancer is not only the most common cancer in women, but it is also the highest incidence of cancer¹. To combat the consequential disease, the World Health Organisation (WHO) recently released a new Global Breast Cancer Initiative (GBCI) Framework² aimed to save millions of lives by 2040. In this issue of HealthNews, we will delve into what this new framework means for patients.

An overview of WHO's Global Breast Cancer Initiative *Framework* 

	Goals	Patient-care pathways	Solutions
Health promotion for early detection	>60% of breast cancers are diagnosed and treated as early-stage disease.	Clinical assessment and screening.	Public education and professional training programmes.
Timely breast diagnosis	Breast cancers to be diagnosed within 60 days of initial presentation. Treatment should start within 3 months of first presentation.	Clinical evaluation, diagnostic imaging, biopsy, and pathological diagnosis.	Organise services that are easily accessible.
Comprehensive breast-cancer management	>80% of patients receive their recommended treatment to completion.	Multidisciplinary treatment planning, endocrine therapy, and clinical follow up.	Receiving and completing quality cancer-directed therapies along with supportive management.

The new 2023 GBCI framework, which was aptly launched just prior to World Cancer Day, aims to help countries strengthen their health systems such that they are able to respond to the growing burden of breast cancer. The framework consists of 3 main pillars³:

1. Health promotion for early detection
2. Timely breast diagnosis
3. Comprehensive breast-cancer management

By adhering to these pillars, WHO hopes that countries will not only be able to support health promotion, but also empower women to seek and receive healthcare.

Health promotion for early detection

The first pillar aims to have more than 60% of breast cancers to be diagnosed and treated as early-stage disease. This is as every country that hit this target has shown a sustained decline in breast-cancer mortality rates of 2% per year or more for at least three consecutive years⁴. This means that early detection is key.

Globally, the majority of breast cancers are first detected by patients and are diagnosed based on clinical symptoms⁵. Thus, countries should conduct public education to increase overall breast-health awareness and have the capacity to diagnose symptomatic breast complaints, regardless of whether patients can afford and attend breast cancer screening programmes.

As individuals, we can educate ourselves and achieve adequate breast-health awareness, which includes understanding the various breast cancer risk factors, symptoms, and screening options.

Timely breast diagnosis

The second pillar aims for breast cancers to be diagnosed within 60 days of initial presentation to a healthcare system. This is as timely cancer diagnosis and staging may lead to a higher chance of breast cancer survival. The second pillar also recommends treatment to start within 3 months of first presentation.

After a breast abnormality is detected, diagnostic imaging will be required to reveal whether a mass (or abnormality) is present. Thereafter, the doctor may request a breast cancer biopsy for further evaluation. Otherwise, the patient will be discharged and asked to return for short-term follow-up or annual surveillance.

Meanwhile, patients can explore available resources to find out more about the diagnostic journey and be well-prepared for it. It is vital to clarify any doubts you may have during the diagnostic process with your healthcare provider.

Comprehensive breast-cancer management

The third pillar aims to have more than 80% of patients receive their recommended treatment to completion. This is as the optimal effectiveness of breast cancer therapies depends on treatment beginning within 3 months of diagnosis and completed without interruption⁶. Completing one's treatment can lead to better patient outcomes, including better survival and improved quality of life.

What this means for patients is that the optimal treatment plan for breast cancer should be prioritised. The GBCI framework focuses on a multidisciplinary approach, including surgery, radiotherapy, and systemic treatments tailored to the specific needs of every patient. Besides treatment, supportive services are also necessary for patient compliance, effective care delivery during treatment, and recovery following therapy. Supportive services include pain management, physiotherapy, medications, psycho-oncology services, and lymphedema management.

Following treatment, breast cancer survivors may experience long-term treatment complications and the possibility of cancer recurrence. As such, the framework recommends monitoring and support services to be provided as they will greatly benefit these individuals.

Closing the care gap

As the most diagnosed form of cancer globally, breast cancer should not be overlooked. WHO's GBCI framework will be pivotal in providing countries with evidence-based guidelines to strengthen their health systems and provide better care to patients.

By implementing the GBCI framework, countries will be able to better manage breast cancer by encouraging early detection and diagnosis together with implementing effective multimodality treatment. This will in turn empower patients with knowledge, support, and the potential for brighter outcomes. ■

¹World Cancer Research Fund International, 2020.

²Global breast cancer initiative implementation framework. WHO, 2023.

³WHO launches new roadmap on breast cancer. WHO, 2023.

⁴National health system characteristics, breast cancer stage at diagnosis, and breast cancer mortality: a population-based analysis. 2021.

⁵Breast cancer screening: IARC Working Group on the Evaluation of Cancer-Preventive Intervention. 2016.

⁶Breast cancer survival and survival gap apportionment in sub-Saharan Africa. 2020.



IS WEARING PINK ENOUGH? WHAT CAN YOU DO TO RAISE AWARENESS OF BREAST CANCER? AND WHY YOU DO IT

Breast Cancer Awareness Month (BCAM) is an international awareness month to raise global attention and generate support for breast cancer patients and survivors. In this issue of HealthNews, we shed light on what you can do to raise awareness of breast cancer beyond donning the pink ribbon.

During October, also known as Breast Cancer Awareness Month (BCAM), many will be wearing pink ribbons to show their support for breast cancer patients and survivors, but do you know how ribbons came to symbolise various causes?

The history of wearing ribbons to support a cause can be traced back to a 1973 hit song, "Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Ole Oak Tree", which inspired the Vietnam prisoners of war to do exactly that. Soon enough, people were tying yellow ribbons around trees for the American hostages in Iran in 1979, which later inspired advocates to create a red ribbon to raise awareness about Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

Shortly after, Charlotte Haley created a pink ribbon to raise awareness about breast cancer—the disease that her grandmother, sister and daughter had. However, it was Susan G. Komen who helped popularise the pink ribbon that we know of today.

What can you do to raise awareness of breast cancer?

Raising awareness of breast cancer is more than just wearing a pink ribbon during BCAM; it is also about education, reducing stigma, advocating for primary prevention, and supporting organisations that support the cause.

1. Education

At the individual level, it is important to educate yourself and achieve adequate breast-health awareness. This includes learning about the risk factors of breast cancer so that you can improve your health behaviours and reduce your risk. Such factors include¹:

- Family history
- Certain inherited genes
- History of malignant or benign (non-cancerous) breast disease
- Early onset of menstruation
- Late menopause
- Having first child after the age of 35
- Having fewer children or never had children
- Being on hormone replacement therapy
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Being overweight or obese

Besides the risk factors of breast cancer, it is also important to be aware of specific breast cancer symptoms. To recognise them, individuals should learn how to conduct a monthly breast self-examination (BSE) and know when to visit a healthcare provider for a check up.

Women over the age of 40 should start going for yearly mammogram screenings while those with a family history of breast cancer should begin screening earlier². Although mammograms are not routinely offered to men, your doctor may recommend regular screening tests and follow-ups if you have a family history of breast cancer or an inherited genetic mutation that increases your risk of male breast cancer.

2. Reducing stigma

Cancer is often shrouded in stigma; it starts even before one is diagnosed with cancer and continues even after one is declared cancer-free. Stigma surrounding breast cancer often arises due to fear, misinformation, or misconceptions of breast cancer. In order to combat stigma, we have to spread awareness and normalise clinical assessments, breast cancer screening, and treatment therapies.

¹"Breast Cancer". PCC.

²"Male vs Female Breast Cancer: What is the Difference?". PCC, 2022.

After achieving adequate breast-health awareness, we can then educate others and improve knowledge about breast cancer, which includes risk factors and symptoms. This will help normalise going for early detection programmes and breast cancer screening, and eventually eradicate the stigma associated with cancer.

3. Supporting organisations that support the cause

During BCAM, the pink ribbon will be ubiquitous. In fact, the colour pink has come to be associated with BCAM and many companies and organisations have been promoting pink products in support of the cause.

Although this is great for raising awareness, many companies have been accused of "pinkwashing"—a term coined by Breast Cancer Action that illustrates how certain organisations claim to care about breast cancer by promoting a pink ribbon product, but at the same time produce, manufacture, or sell products containing chemicals that are implicated in the disease.

Many organisations also use the colour pink to market their product for profit instead of using pink as an effective fundraising approach for breast cancer. Thus, we need to be wary of such organisations and only support those that contribute substantially to research as well as non-profit organisations.

Alternatively, we can support small businesses run by breast cancer survivors or donate directly to esteemed cancer research organisations and non-profit breast cancer organisations, such as the Breast Cancer Foundation (BCF). You can also donate to BCF at Parkway Cancer Centre (PCC) clinics as PCC places a BCF donation box in all of their clinics during the month of October.

Making a difference

Everybody has the ability to make a difference—even by doing something small like wearing a pink ribbon to raise awareness during BCAM. As an individual, it is important to do what you can to raise awareness of breast cancer. Your efforts will not only help reduce the stigma surrounding breast cancer, but also help promote breast-health awareness amongst those around you. ■






HOW DOES BREAST CANCER AFFECT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?

At Breast Cancer Foundation’s ‘Members Pink Talk’, Parkway Cancer Centre counsellor Jaime Yeo shared some strategies to navigate the impact of breast cancer—the top cancer among women in Singapore.

Receiving a breast cancer diagnosis and undergoing breast cancer treatment are major events that can have a significant impact on women. Many women with breast cancer may struggle with mental health issues, even after completing treatment.

To understand the impact of breast cancer on women’s mental health, there is a need to first understand the

physical impact of breast cancer treatment on the body. Undergoing a mastectomy or going through treatment with side effects such as hair loss, weight changes, medical menopause, and fertility issues can have an emotional, psychological and social impact on women’s lives. This can affect:

-  Quality of life
-  Body image and self-esteem
-  Sense of self









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Jaime Yeo provides psychosocial and emotional counselling support for patients and their family members. She integrates approaches such as Person-Centered Therapy, Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy, Narrative Therapy and Eye-Movement Desensitisation Therapy (EMDR) in her work with patients.

-  Family planning
-  Relationships and intimacy

Or result in:

-  Grief and loss
-  Stress
-  Mood swings
-  Fear of cancer recurrence
-  Depression
-  Anxiety

Understanding that the body can affect the mind can help us appreciate why someone with cancer may struggle not just physically, but emotionally, psychologically, and socially as well.

Breast cancer and change

Going through a cancer journey can bring about many changes, from tangible and intangible losses to learning and experiencing various emotions.

Changes in the body because of treatment may alter women’s outward appearances and certain physical functions such as sexuality and fertility. In addition, societal attitudes and beliefs towards women’s bodies and appearances can add pressure on how women perceive their physical appearance, causing physical distress, disturbance of one’s body image and dissatisfaction with one’s self. Many breast cancer survivors struggle with feeling good and confident about their bodies, affecting their mental health and concept of self i.e. what we believe about ourselves and how others perceive our identity, self-esteem, and the social roles we play.

6 suggestions for better mental health and hope

Fortunately, there is always hope regardless of the severity of the disease, as hope is multidimensional. Living with hope can help women with breast cancer—even those in advanced stages—manage their mental health and contribute to better physical health and their concept of self.

The following suggestions are steps that individuals can take to better manage their mental health and begin living life with renewed hope:

1. Acknowledge your losses

Negative coping strategies such as denial and avoidance can adversely affect our physical health, mood, and quality of life. By identifying our losses and acknowledging the feelings that come with them (e.g. shock, anger, grief), we can give a name to what we value and better articulate what we are experiencing.


2. Attend to your emotions

Many of us can get uncomfortable with our emotions because of what society has taught us. But contrary to common societal beliefs, emotions are a natural part of who we are and tell us what is important to us.

Attending to our emotions begins with recognising and describing what we feel, asking ourselves where our emotions are coming from, and regulating them by talking to someone, going for a walk, or meditating, and more.

3. Nurture your relationships and connections

Relationships and social support are good protective factors against stressful events and they contribute to hope via a connection beyond the self. At the same time, we need to recognise that there is room for fluidity and boundaries in relationships and that we often have the power to choose and seek out relationships that are helpful for us.

 **4. Take care of your body**

Regular exercise is associated with higher self-esteem, mood, and psychological well-being. Studies show that breast cancer survivors with more active lifestyles had a more positive attitude towards their physical condition and sexual attractiveness, and had less confusion, fatigue, and depression.

Additionally, exercise helps us to feel more confident and in control. Besides cardiovascular exercise, dance and movement therapies have also been shown to improve mental health and quality of life.

 **5. Live in the present**

It is important to not allow the past or the future to rob us of the present moment. We can attempt to live in the present by practising daily gratitude. Listing the things you are grateful for every day can lead to higher levels of daily psychological functioning, greater perceived support, and adaptive coping strategies.

 **6. Create meaning and hope**

Creating meaning and hope in our lives begins with recognising the multifaceted nature of hope, re-evaluating what is personally significant to you, and practising self-compassion by accepting yourself and showing yourself kindness when you experience suffering. Doing this can make way for post-traumatic growth, which could include increasing our appreciation of life, fostering meaningful relationships, developing our personal strengths, and discovering new possibilities in life.

Changes as a result of cancer treatment may lead to experiences of loss, learning, gain, and different emotions. Fortunately, we can live with hope by recognising that hope is multifaceted, acknowledging the painful parts of our experiences, taking care of our bodies and emotions, practising gratitude and self-compassion, and actively seeking out new meaning in our lives. ■



RESOURCES FOR YOU

Breast Cancer: 8 Questions with Dr See Hui Ti



Empowering Women to Beat Breast Cancer



Male vs Female Breast Cancer: What is the Difference?



BITTERSWEET TRUTH: THE IMPACT OF SUGARY BEVERAGES

Bubble teas, frappuccinos, and sodas—these sugary beverages are often so enticing that we can't resist having them with our meals. However, these beverages are not as innocent as they may seem.

Understanding the ingredients

The most common ingredient of sugary beverages, other than water, is sugar. Sugar comes in many forms, including sucrose, fructose, glucose, and lactose. Sucrose is a common table sugar composed of glucose and fructose, and it is the backbone of many sweetened beverages.

Fructose is often derived from high-fructose corn syrup and it can pose a strain on the liver when overconsumed. Meanwhile, glucose is mainly derived from carbohydrates. Glucose may provide a quick source of energy but it can also cause a yo-yo effect where one's blood sugar can spike and crash.

Milk-based sugary beverages will have lactose—a type of sugar that is only found naturally in milk and provides a good source of calcium. However, the culprit behind weight gain is often the added sugar, especially when overindulged.



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What's missing from these beverages?

Perhaps what's concerning about sugary beverages is not just about what they contain, but also about what they lack. Unlike whole foods that provide essential vitamins, minerals, and fibre, these beverages offer little beyond their sugar content.

Overconsumption can lead to an unbalanced diet and deprive the body of essential nutrients needed for proper function. This is especially concerning for growing children, as excessive sugar intake can hinder intake of other nutrient-dense foods and also add to the growing issue of dental caries—also known as tooth decay—in young teeth.

Health implications

Other than the pure bliss and satisfaction we get from drinking sugary beverages, there are also many health implications we simply cannot stir away. These drinks are often laden with empty calories that can stealthily tip the scales, leading to weight gain and a higher risk of diabetes. For someone with diabetes, these rapid spikes in blood sugar levels caused by the high sugar content makes managing diabetes much harder. Poorly managed diabetes will trigger an inflammatory response as the body struggles to process the sudden influx. Prolonged inflammation is linked to a host of health problems including heart disease, obesity, and certain cancers.

Sugary beverages also have the potential to raise triglycerides—a form of bad cholesterol—and could be the catalysts for fatty liver.

Regular consumption of sugary beverages often pave the way for oral health issues. The abundance of sugars they contain are a luxurious feast for harmful oral bacteria, leading to the production of acids that erode tooth enamel, which will result in tooth decay and cavities.

Unravelling the bitter truth

Our relationship with sugary beverages is often made complicated by their alluring ability to temporarily boost our mood. After the initial high we get from consuming such beverages, our blood sugar levels can rapidly drop and cause mood swings, leaving us irritable. This emotional roller coaster can affect our overall well-being.

Sugary beverages can be deceptive in how they seem to impact our hydration. While they may temporarily quench our thirst, they can contribute to dehydration in the long run. In fact, these drinks may leave us feeling thirstier after consumption. Thus, the most effective way to stay hydrated is by consuming plain water, or opt for healthier alternatives, such as fruit-infused water or tea with no added sugars.

There are some scientific studies that suggest that sugary beverages can be addictive. This is due to the high sugar content of these beverages and how they impact the brain's reward and pleasure centres.

Sugary beverages: our verdict

Let's not sugar-coat the facts; the consumption of sugary beverages are associated with a range of health problems. However, there may be medical circumstances where sugary beverages are used, such as in managing hypoglycemia—a condition in which your blood sugar (glucose) level is lower than the standard range.

While there is no need to cut out sugar entirely from our lives, we can aim to reduce or eliminate the consumption of sugary beverages for a healthier lifestyle and improve our overall well-being. If you're used to having sugary beverages with your meals, you can always opt for healthier alternatives (such as water, fresh fruit juice, or milk) instead! ■



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