

MEDIA RELEASE

Breast Cancer Awareness Month (BCAM) October 2008 ~ focuses beyond women with high risk of getting breast cancer. Campaign targets the family and loved ones.

- **Breast cancer is on the rise and remains one of the major killers**
- **Preventive screening holds the key to combating the disease**
- **Family support can make a difference in encouraging women to go for regular screenings**

Singapore, 04 October 2008 – There is an increase in the number of newly diagnosed breast cancer cases and breast cancer deaths according to latest official statistics. There were 627 new cases reported from 1968 - 1972 and it rose to 6773 new cases from 2003 to 2007¹. The number of deaths resulting from breast cancer increased from 193 from 1968 – 1972 to 1566 for 2003 – 2007².

To arrest this trend, women who are at high risk of getting breast cancer must go for regular preventive screening because early detection will enable the disease to be treated and cured.

This year, the national Breast Cancer Awareness Month Committee (BCAM) is targeting its campaign to include family members and loved ones to seek their support to get the women in their lives to go for such screenings.

The BCAM committee comprises of representatives from the National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS), Breast Cancer Foundation (BCF), Singapore Cancer Society (SCS), and The Cancer Institute, National Healthcare Group (TCI, NHG). Today the campaign is officially launched by the Guest-of-Honour Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, the Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports.

He will also flag off the Reebok Pink Ribbon Walk today, which starts from Raffles Landing Site, Empress Place, at 5pm.

¹ Source: Singapore Cancer Registry

² Source: Registry of Births and Deaths

This is the 11th year for BCAM, which has come out with this year's campaign slogan: "The Women In Our Lives".

Dr Ho Gay Hui, chairperson for this year's BCAM Committee said, "Treatment for early stage breast cancers have very good outcomes and thus early detection would be key to better survival. Data shows that almost 60 percent of women with DCIS³, and half of women with stage-one breast cancers, underwent breast-conserving surgeries⁴. Having adjusted for ethnicity, type of surgery, and admitting hospital, DCIS and stage-one invasive cancers had better survival within three-year after diagnosis than late stage invasive cancers (stage two to stage four)⁵."

Dr Ho, who is also Senior Consultant Breast Surgeon at the NCCS, added that based on her clinical experience, patients who have strong family support also tend to do better.

Breast cancer can develop at any time. As such, screening should not be once-off. It is important for women to go for screening at the recommended intervals. Women aged 50–69 are strongly encouraged to go for regular mammography once every two years while women aged 40–49 may go for screening once a year. This is so that if cancer develops, there is a higher chance of finding it as early as possible.⁶

"Screening mammography is the most effective tool in the early detection of breast cancer. It can detect early changes in the breast that may not be felt by hands," said Dr Shyamala Thilagaratnam, Director for Healthy Ageing Division at Health Promotion Board. To make mammography screening more accessible and affordable, the Health Promotion Board has an all-year subsidised screening programme, BreastScreen Singapore (BSS), for mammograms done at the X-ray centres of the polyclinics.

"Based on the year 2007 National Health Surveillance Survey, only 41.0 % of women aged 50-69 years reported going for a mammogram in the past two years and data from the subsidised screening programme showed that only 48.1% of women aged 50-69 years go for their re-screen at the recommended screening interval," added Dr Thilagaratnam.

Aiming to improve early and regular screening rates, the BCAM committee thus extends its focus to include encouraging family support and motivation from the loved ones at home to

³ Ductal carcinoma-in-situ: Non-invasive breast cancers confined to the breast ducts.

⁴ Breast-conserving surgery is a type of surgery that removes only a part of the affected breast, while mastectomy is a surgery that removes all of the breast tissue, sometimes along with other nearby tissues (American Cancer Society, 2007).

⁵ Source: Singapore Cancer Registry

⁶ Source: Breast Cancer Epidemiology (1997 to 2006) and the Impact of the National Breast Cancer Screening Programme

make a difference in getting women, especially those 50 years and above, who are at higher risk of breast cancer to go for regular screening.

To complement the BCAM efforts, different screening centres are offering discounted mammography screening (See Annex 1) and the BCAM committee is organising a variety of exciting activities (See Annex 2) to highlight the key messages of the awareness month. The activities are supported by Health Promotion Board, and made possible with the help of several kind sponsors (See Annex 3).

Enclosed: Annex 1 - Listing for Discounted Mammogram Screening, Annex 2 - Calendar of Activities, Annex 3 - BCAM 2008 Sponsors List

The BCAM Committee:

About The National Cancer Centre Singapore (www.nccs.com.sg)

The National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS) is the premier cancer research and treatment facility in Singapore and in the region. Established in 1997, we see about 68 per cent of the public sector medical oncology cases and about 65 per cent of radiation oncology cases. Adopting a multidisciplinary and holistic approach to cancer care, NCCS not only diagnoses and treats but also provides a whole spectrum of allied health services to assist our patients in their recovery. NCCS houses the most number of oncologists in Singapore and is equipped with the largest number of equipment to provide the latest radiation oncology care in Singapore.

About Breast Cancer Foundation (www.bcf.org.sg)

Breast Cancer Foundation (BCF) is a non-profit charity organisation, established in October 1997. Under the leadership of its Patron, Mayor (Mrs) Yu-Foo Yee Shoon and her dedicated, enthusiastic executive committee comprising mostly lay people and some medical professionals, BCF's mission is to: Eradicate breast cancer as a life-threatening disease.

Breast cancer, if detected early, can save lives and breast. BCF hopes that by raising awareness of breast cancer and encouraging women to screen regularly, breast cancer will be detected earlier and the chances of surviving the disease will be greatly enhanced.

About Singapore Cancer Society (www.singaporecancersociety.org.sg)

Established in 1964, the Singapore Cancer Society (SCS) is a self-funding voluntary welfare organisation on a mission to prevent and control cancer, and enhance health and quality of life in the community through education, research and patient care services. We have since assumed a leading role in the promotion of cancer prevention and control through education and research. Today, our services have extended to include looking after the special needs of cancer patients and their families, providing financial assistance to needy cancer stricken

families, continual support for cancer survivors, rehabilitation care for patients receiving treatment, and home medical care for terminally ill cancer patients.

About The Cancer Institute (www.tci.nhg.com.sg)

The Cancer Institute (TCI) of the National Healthcare Group (NHG) integrates the various cancer-related specialties at NHG to provide patients with the full continuum of cancer care, ranging from screening, early diagnosis and treatment to long-term health maintenance and public education. Guided by our belief that having cancer is not the end of life, TCI adopts a patient-centric and multidisciplinary approach to ensure that our patients have access to dedicated professional care, wherever they need them and in the most effective manner. TCI@NUH is also actively engaged in cancer research and experimental cancer therapeutics with international research groups and partners to find safer and more effective treatments that ultimately lead to improved outcomes.

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