



Jordan
Dedicated To
Early Detection
of **Breast**
Cancer

PICTURE COURTESY OF GRAPHEAST JORDAN | CORBIS

The infamous expression '*Ignorance is bliss*' is fervently manifested when it comes to the topic of breast cancer in Jordan, whereby it is a common tendency to shy away with an "I rather *not* know" approach. Simply hearing the words "breast cancer" is enough to send many women running in the opposite direction. But, as understandable as this reaction may be, ignorance can not protect anyone against breast cancer, whereas early detection can. Breast cancer is not a disease you should be afraid of, but it is a disease you should be aware of.

BREAST CANCER IN JORDAN

Breast cancer is the most frequent cancer as well as the most common malignancy afflicting women in Jordan. According to the latest statistics from the Jordan National Cancer Registry, over 650 females were diagnosed with breast cancer in 2005, accounting for more than 35% of all female new cancer cases and 18% of the total new cancer cases. Jordanian women are afflicted with breast cancer at a median age of 51, when they are still raising children, caring for their families, and contributing to the development of society. Even though the incidence of breast cancer in Jordan is lower than in Western countries, the mortality rate is very high due to late presentation. Unfortunately, 70% of breast cancer cases in the country are presented at advanced stages (III-IV) during which survival rates are low and the disease is less curable.

The past few months have witnessed a profound increase in breast cancer related activities, including awareness campaigns, lectures, and discounted mammography services. This is largely due to the establishment of the Jordan Breast Cancer Program (JBCP); a nation-wide initiative for the development and provision of comprehensive services for the screening and early detection of breast cancer for females in Jordan.

PARTNERSHIPS AND ONGOING ACTIVITIES

Coordinating and building on the ongoing efforts of its various Jordanian partners, JBCP adopts a multidimensional approach that covers the provision of screening services, education of females, capacity building of health professionals and quality assurance. Although newly established,

JBCP has already embarked on a number of initiatives. Most recently, building on the hype of Mother's Day and International Women's Day, the program launched the "*Salima*" (Be Well) Campaign in March 2008, under the slogan "*Early Detection of Breast Cancer Saves Lives!*" The campaign aimed to raise awareness on the importance of early detection and promote attainment of clinical breast exams and mammograms. The campaign's activities included educational lectures, radio messages, television interviews, articles, information booths at shopping malls, discounted mammography services, free clinical breast examinations, and a free hotline.

"Knowledge is power. Instead of living under the shadow of myths and denials, women must know their options and be able

to act on them. Every woman needs to know what she can do to lower her risk of developing breast cancer. Therefore, the best defense against breast cancer is a good offense..."

TWO PROGRAMS HAVE THUS FAR BEEN INITIATED IN JORDAN:

1. Susan G. Komen for the Cure Global Initiative for Breast Cancer Awareness is a program that brings together Komen for the Cure, the Institute of International Education, and local partners. The primary goal of this initiative is to create a dynamic global network of dedicated activists with the skills, knowledge, and vision to play a strategic role in shaping their country's response to breast cancer. Jordan recently witnessed the program launch in Irbid, under the patronage of HRH Princess Dina Mired, Director General of the King Hussein Cancer Foundation. Addressing the Governor of Irbid, workshop participants and other guests, HRH Princess Dina affirmed:

"You will be the community ambassadors for breast cancer – this training will empower you with skills and knowledge to advocate on behalf of your community and for your community – to ensure that all the services for early detection are available... We believe in you and the role of the grass roots in changing your communities' behavior..."

2. Making it Our Business is a workplace awareness program for breast cancer, introduced by the King Hussein Cancer Foundation in cooperation with Vital Voices Global Partnership and the Middle East Partnership Initiative. This program is dedicated to educating the employees, families, and customers of participating companies about breast cancer and early detection methods. Train-the-trainer workshops will be conducted to empower employees to spread the word in the fight against breast cancer, and then carry out internal workplace awareness trainings.

A multitude of other JBCP initiatives are underway, including activation of several existing mammography units for screening, set up of new units in health care centers, and preparation for the upcoming Breast Cancer Awareness Month Campaign in October, just to name a few.

With incidence rates increasing each year, breast cancer will continue to unnecessarily claim the lives of many women we love and care about; our mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and best friends. However, we have a good chance of beating this disease if we encourage our loved ones to get routine checkups and follow the national screening guidelines. It is up to each and every one of us to help spread the message that *Early Detection of Breast Cancer Saves Lives!*

WHAT IS BREAST CANCER?

Breast cancer occurs when abnormal cells in the milk ducts or lobules of the breast grow out of control, and can then invade the surrounding breast tissues. If left untreated, cancer cells in the breast tissue can break away and spread to other parts of the body through the blood stream or lymphatic system.

WHAT CAUSES BREAST CANCER?

The causes of breast cancer are not fully known, but there are certain risk factors that are linked to the disease. Having one or more risk factors for breast cancer does *not* mean that you will get breast cancer. It means that your chances of developing breast cancer are higher than women who have fewer risks factors. However, many women with breast cancer do not have any known risk factors aside from being female.

ARE YOU AT RISK FOR BREAST CANCER?

Simply being female and getting older put you at risk. Additionally, there are a number of other risk factors listed below that are linked to the disease. It is important to remember that there are some risk factors that you can control and others that you can not change.

WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS?

- Being female
- Getting older
- Family history of cancer (breast, ovarian, uterine, colon)
- Any personal history of benign breast disease
- Previous breast biopsy
- Previous cosmetic or other breast surgery
- Exposure to large amounts of radiation, such as frequent X-rays in youth
- Early onset of menarche (before age 12)
- Late onset of menopause (after age 55)
- Having no children
- Not breastfeeding
- Late age at first pregnancy (after 35)
- Use of hormone replacement therapy (HRT)
- Atypical hyperplasia or LCIS (lobular carcinoma in situ)
- Lack of exercise
- Smoking
- Alcohol consumption
- Obesity



HRH Princess Ghida Talal, HRH Princess Dina Mired, Dr. Mahmoud Sarhan and First Lady Laura Bush, during unveiling of model screening center at the King Hussein Cancer Center, October 2007.



A Volunteer ready to distribute educational brochures and pink ribbon pins during "Salima" (Be Well) Campaign Roadshow at City Mall, March 2008.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

The best way to protect yourself against breast cancer is by maintaining routine checkups. The best course of action will depend on your age and your risk, so talk to your doctor about any risk factors that you may have.

For women at normal risk, the diagram below summarizes the national recommendations in Jordan:

| SCREENING / AGE | 20 – 29 | 30 – 39 | 40 – 49 | 50 + |
|----------------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|----------|
| Self Breast Exam | Monthly | Monthly | Monthly | Monthly |
| Clinical Breast Exam | Every two years | Annually | Annually | Annually |
| Mammogram | ----- | Once at 35 | Every two years | Annually |

There are many options for women at increased risk. Your doctor may suggest that you start getting annual mammograms earlier, and that you have more frequent Clinical Breast Exams (CBEs). Adopting a healthy lifestyle is also important. As risk factors that you can control, you should try keeping your weight within healthy limits, particularly after menopause. You should also exercise regularly, quit smoking if you do, limit your alcohol consumption and maintain a well-balanced diet, with plenty of fruits and vegetables. **U**