



ABC of Breast Cancer Awareness

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October is recognized as The Breast Cancer Awareness Month when international campaigns are organized to raise research and development funds, enable patient support groups and more importantly encourage women to know the facts about their leading cause of cancer death.

Initiated in 1985, the program's main objective is encouraging regular breast examination and mammography for screening of breast cancer.¹ Studies show that the movement has been successful in promoting detection of breast cancer at earlier stages.² Interestingly, it has been shown that during October, search trends for the term "breast cancer" across all Google domains significantly increased, indicating more concern and attention among the public and maybe among health professionals, as well.³ This success can be attributed both to the specific events during the campaign and to cumulative increases in public awareness and the following behavioral changes.²

The majority of breast cancer deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries, where awareness is limited and delayed admission is common.^{4,5} For instance in Iran, the incidence of breast cancer disease is rising and many patients present with advanced stages due to delay in admission and they are in average one decade younger than their western counterparts at the first presentation.^{6,7} Nevertheless, studies show that

awareness of women regarding breast cancer warning signs and screening is very limited.^{8,9} Studies from other countries with limited resources also emphasize the urgent need for improving breast cancer awareness, especially because the future rising breast cancer mortality rates are expected to be greatest in these countries.^{10,11}

For designing effective awareness programs, it's essential that main themes are recognized according to the knowledge gaps. Accordingly, **ABC** of breast cancer awareness can be suggested and summarized as follow:

A: *All* women are at risk. They should know that breast cancer is the most common cancer killer among women worldwide. While many women might think breast cancer mainly occurs in developed nations and among those with positive family history, most breast cancer deaths develop in developing countries;

B: Awareness of early signs and symptoms and adherence to regular and age-appropriate **breast cancer screening** is recommended for every woman;

C: Breast cancer is **curable**, especially when detected in early stages.

More research is needed to show which breast cancer facts are the most mandatory to include in campaigns, which groups of women are more responsive to these messages, the main misconceptions that need to be addressed and the extent to which these community awareness campaigns are effective in reducing breast cancer burden.

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