# BREAST CANCER

CANCER – is the most deadly word a patient can hear from the doctor. It is the most dreaded disease and second cause of death after cardiovascular diseases. Among different types of cancer, women suffer mostly from cervical and breast cancer. Breast cancer prevalence is widespread both in developed and developing countries.

Breast cancer occurrence at early age is due to lifestyle changes – late marriage, lesser children, worsening trend of breast feeding are some of the factors, including obesity. There is another peculiar problem attached to Indian women, who by sociological and cultural factors are averse to discuss structural changes in their bodies and postpone visiting doctors for advice. This is prevalent not only in upper echelon of society which are staying in urban areas but also down to rural areas where even to discuss this subject among peers is a taboo. Cancer is a dreaded word and most patients worry about social stigma in associating themselves with the disease and the very fact that if at they are detected with same the prohibitive cost of medication makes them postpone even basic screening to detect breast cancer at very early stages.

As per Globocan Report 2012, India, China and the US together contribute to over 33% of global breast cancer problem. Nearly 1.67 million new cases of cancer were reported in 2012 (25% of all cancers).

## Globocan Report 2012

Breast Cancer

SOURCE: HTTP://GLOBOCAN.IARC.FR

Estimated Incidence, Mortality and Prevalence Worldwide in 2012

| Estimated numbers (thousands) | Cases | Deaths | 5-year prev. |
|---|---|---|---|
| World | 1677 | 522 | 6255 |
| More developed regions | 794 | 198 | 3224 |
| Less developed regions | 883 | 324 | 3032 |
| WHO Africa region (AFRO) | 100 | 49 | 318 |
| WHO Americas region (PAHO) | 408 | 92 | 1618 |
| WHO East Mediterranean region (EMRO) | 99 | 42 | 348 |
| WHO Europe region (EURO) | 500 | 143 | 1960 |
| WHO South-East Asia region (SEARO) | 240 | 110 | 735 |
| WHO Western Pacific region (WPRO) | 330 | 86 | 1276 |
| IARC membership (24 countries) | 940 | 257 | 3614 |
| United States of America | 233 | 44 | 971 |
| China | 187 | 48 | 697 |
| India | 145 | 70 | 397 |
| European Union (EU-28) | 367 | 91 | 1467 |

SOURCE: HTTP://GLOBOCAN.IARC.FR

International Agency for Research on Cancer

World Health Organization

- / +

Year: 2012

| Metric | Country | Count | ASR/P |
|---|---|---|---|
| C50 : Breast | | | |
| Incidence - Female | India | 144,937 | 25.8 |
| | United States of America | 232,714 | 92.9 |
| | China | 187,213 | 22.1 |
| Mortality - Female | India | 70,218 | 12.7 |
| | United States of America | 43,909 | 14.9 |
| | China | 47,984 | 5.4 |
| Prevalence (5yr) - Female | India | 396,991 | 92.6 |
| | United States of America | 970,693 | 753.7 |
| | China | 697,327 | 129.3 |

To summarize the findings -

- 144,937 women diagnosed with breast cancer
- 70,218 women with breast cancer died
- Hence, approximately for 2 women detected with breast cancer 1 dies which is an alarming rate.

The following two tables (1 & 2) shows that the worrying aspect that, in India, breast cancer as a percentage of incidence in India has overtaken cervical cancer between the years 2008 and 2012. While breast cancer contributed to almost 22% of all cancers in 2008 it had risen to 27% in 2012 – thus overtaking cervical cancers which had maximum contribution in 2008 – all in just four years.

Table – 1

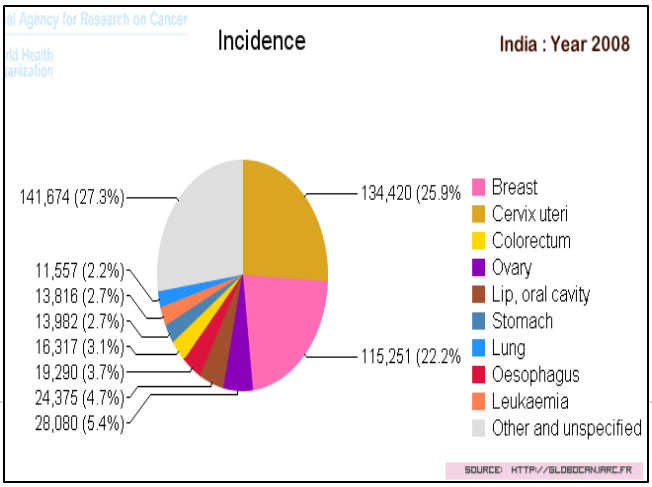
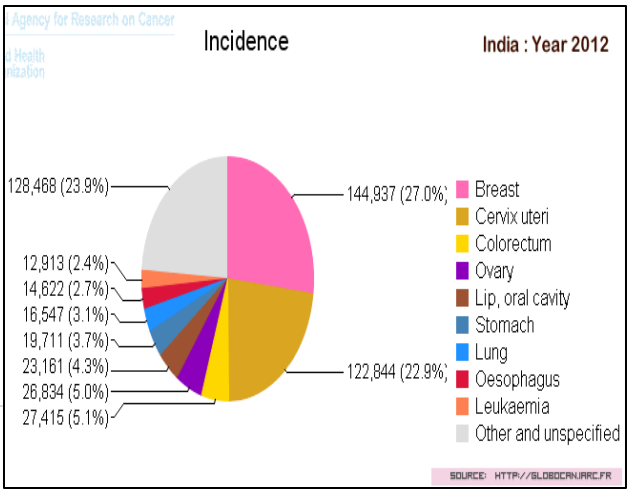
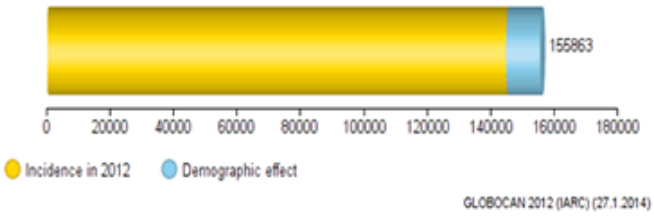
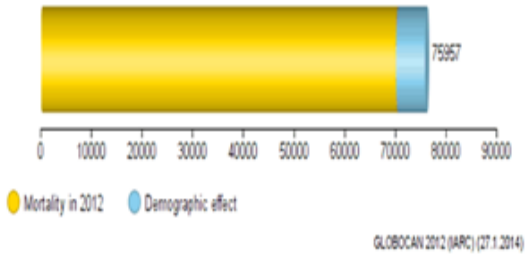



Table – 2



What does the future look like if the present situation continues? Let us take a look at the WHO estimates:




Fresh incidence of women with breast cancer for the year 2015 was forecast at 1, 55,000 in India (Globocan Report 2012). The actual numbers are yet to come by. Approximately 76,000 deaths due to breast cancer was expected during the year 2015.

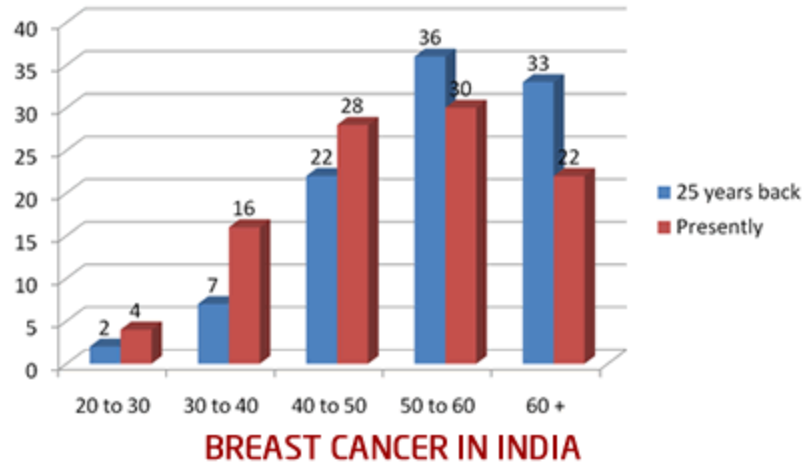
How painful these figures look like. Is there something we can do about it? Do we have a better understanding of its spread within our country – is it concentrated in some pockets only so that containment is easier or is it all over?

However, some more facts are worth considering.

- **Shift in the incidence of breast cancer to younger age compared to a decade ago**

  Table 3 shows that in India, over the last few decades the average age of developing a breast cancer has undergone a significant shift in age. As is evident from the chart almost 69% of the cases reported a quarter of a century back were in age groups 50 and above. However, the situation today has turned around and it has dropped to 52% while the younger age (20 to 40 years of age) has risen to almost 48%, with the most vulnerable group being women in the age bracket of 25 to 40 years.

## Table – 3




Source: breastcancerindia.net

- **Rising number of breast cancers in India**

  The figures in the table below shows select city wise dispersion of women who suffer from breast cancer indicating they constitute anywhere between 25% to as high as 32% of all cancer related cases. This is alarming indeed and some solid action at ground level is required.

| **Select Indian Cities- *Incidence of Breast Cancer among all cancers* - Women (2008 - 2011)** | **%age** |
|---|---|
| | |
| Ahmedabad | 32.5 |
| Aurangabad | 30.0 |
| Bangalore | 27.3 |
| Bhopal | 26.7 |
| Chennai | 26.8 |
| Delhi | 26.8 |
| Kolkata | 26.3 |
| Mumbai | 29.7 |
| Nagpur | 32.1 |
| Pune | 31.3 |
| Thiruvanthapuram | 28.9 |

Source - www.breastcancerindia.net

- **Delay in presentation for first time screening – this brings down the survival rates**

  The table below though not applicable to India is worth studying to understand how survival of breast cancer has increased from 75% to almost 89% during the period 1975 to 2004 as reported by ASCO (American Society of Clinical Oncology) in 2009, and shows the improvements in the overall five year survival for various cancers in the United States. The most important reason for this high survival rates is due to early screening, detection, treatment and precautions. Since this is lacking in India, survival rates also dramatically decreases.

Five-Year Survival Rates: 1975-2004
(select cancers)

| Cancer Type | 1975-1977 (%) | 1984-1986 (%) | 1996-2004 (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| All cancers | 50 | 54 | 66 |
| Prostate | 69 | 76 | 99 |
| Thyroid | 93 | 94 | 97 |
| Testis | 83 | 93 | 96 |
| Melanoma† | 82 | 87 | 92 |
| Breast | 75 | 79 | 89 |
| Hodgkin's lymphoma | 74 | 79 | 86 |
| Endometrial | 88 | 84 | 84 |
| Bladder | 74 | 78 | 81 |
| Cervical | 70 | 68 | 73 |
| Kidney | 51 | 56 | 67 |
| Rectum | 49 | 57 | 67 |
| Colon | 52 | 59 | 65 |

Source: breastcancerindia.net

- **Improper knowledge and low awareness levels leading to late screening leading to high mortality rates**

Patients go to doctors at a very late stage of its development – almost stage 3 or 4 or late stage 2 from where survival rates diminish. In the western countries most of the patients present themselves at stage 1 or 2 beginning due to active screening process followed by mammography if needed and hence their survival rate increases.

# What is that we can do?

So, why this precarious situation in India where not only the incidence are rising y-o-y but also the mortality rate? Is there something we can do about it? If so how do battle this out?

India is experiencing an unprecedented rise in the number of breast cancer cases across all sections of society, as are also other countries. There is no way we can prevent breast cancer, but we can definitely detect it early and treat adequately. Only and ONLY with early detection, can we achieve a longer survival. And to make people aware of this early detection, it is going to need a lot of efforts, especially, since Indian society is so deep rooted in myths and alternative treatment and unusual illogical beliefs. It will take a lot of time to reverse this and get people on track.

And the time is NOW.

Presently, India already has one of the worst survivals from breast cancer in the world; has the highest number of women dying from breast cancer in the world; and India ranks number one in the numbers of healthy life years lost (DALY - Disability Adjusted Life Years) due to breast cancer; and if this trend is not broken, the future looks bleak.

How many women, even during a normal health checkup worry about mammography or even basic breast screening test as a part of the same. All this points to one major task ahead of us – **CREATE AWARENESS – REMOVE SOCIAL TABOO – ENCOURAGE EARLY SCREENING – START TREATMENT AT STAGE 1 or 2 – DECREASE MORTALITY RATE.**

## But how do we achieve what we want to achieve?

It would be a hard grind to even come to the level of developed countries where mortality rates are one in five or six compared to one in two in India.

Some of the steps that Learning Links will undertake to create awareness would be:

- Engage NGO's working for women empowerment to spread awareness and make the women go for screening at early age with no taboo attached.
- Hold camps for early detection with the help of empanelled oncologists and trained women nurses
- Connect the women to hospitals so that treatment could be started at the earliest
- Engage community to disseminate information - print, digital media for a continuous period of time to register the message that breast cancer can be cured with early detection.

Donate and help us in this endeavor in empowering women and ensuring a cancer free society.