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HOW THE BAHAMAS HAS ADDRESSED BREAST CANCER SCREENING

What is screening

- The aim of screening is to detect breast cancer at an early stage.
- The benchmark for what is early stage cancer: “when it is too small to feel and hopefully before it has spread beyond the breast to lymph nodes and beyond”.
- This is hopefully to find it when it can be cured.

What are the goals of screening

- To reduce morbidity from breast cancer.
- To reduce the mortality from breast cancer
- To get a firm understanding of the prevalence of breast cancer in a particular population.
- To understand the pathophysiology of the particular cancers peculiar to this population
- Allow for better preventative medicine approach to particular types of breast cancer.

Requirements for a National Screening program

- A central regulatory body to coordinate the program
- An established protocol that binds the performers to a set procedural code of performance.
- An established standard of performance such as the M.Q.S.A of the USA
- Established criteria for certification of all participating technical personal and physicians
- Standardization of all participating facilities.

Screening in the Bahamas based on the prior criteria

- ◉ Does not exist.
- ◉ No standards
- ◉ No Tumor board (attempt in progress to establish same).
- ◉ Consistent with all other English speaking. Caribbean countries surveyed.
- ◉ Programs established by NGOs and concerned medical personnel

So what do we have in the Bahamas

- An awareness program for the population.
- Not a typical screening program.
- A non governmental sponsored attempt to reach as many women as possible with the message and facilities that help find and diagnose breast cancer at an earlier stage.
- A move to empower women to demand a higher standard of practice re their breast healthcare.

Uniqueness of the Bahamas

- An archipelago that covers 100,000 sq.miles.
- The population is less than 400,000
- There are populations in approximately 22 island towns and villages.
- Some of these sites have only 400 residents and are more than 100 miles from any centre for diagnosis and accessible only by plane or boat.

This is a public health nightmare.

Players

- The Cancer society (principal driving force)
- Charitable foundations and private companies.
- Civic groups.
- Trained concerned Medical personnel.
- Private health care facilities

Ways to implement our program

- Corporate sponsorships raise capital. E.g. Ride for hope, “race for the cure” events etc.
- Civic group sponsored information seminars
- Visits to villages and towns coordinated by the Cancer society and the town's affiliates to have awareness education and self examination lectures on monthly basis.
- Distribution of public service announcements in printed and broadcast media.
- Make facilities accessible to all who need to be screened.

Issues in Screening Bahamian women

- Lack of standards legislation.
- No formalized consensus on treatment options.
- No universal buy-in by the healthcare providers
- Shopping for the best price as opposed to the best quality.
- Providers focused on profit rather than quality service.
- Not a governmental priority.

Issues in Screening

- Genetic research now showing the highest incidence for the BRACA gene related cancer in Bahamian women.
- Peak age of discovery/presentation is 43yrs as opposed to 55yrs elsewhere.
- Established worldwide screening principles (such as ages to start screening) are not accurate for this population.
- Breast cancer common in women in early thirties and late twenties.
- Genetic cancer is proven 1 in 5 cases of proven breast cancer in the Bahamas.

What needs to be done to make screening more successful.

- The Ministry must not accept donated equipment only to appease opposition without insisting that the facilities enact the performance criteria all other players are expected to meet.
- The MOH must immediately establish a Tumor board and enact legislation for a screening audit so as to get an accurate assessment of tumor incidence and types.

What needs to be done to make screening more successful.

- The ministry of health must without delay enact legislation that makes the screening program a state instituted program.
- The government must pass legislation like the MQSA of the USA in order that the facilities and personnel performing mammography meet minimal standards.
- The MOH must enforce the rules the govern this program.

Positives re breast Cancer screening in the Bahamas

- More women are screened today than ever before.
- Women are greatly empowered
- The populace is aware of the need for screening and therefore encouraging participation
- More women are being cured from breast cancer.
- Breast cancer stage reduction has been a major achievement.
- Breast cancer mortality has been significantly reduced.

references

- . Donenberg T, Lunn J, Curling D et al. A high prevalence of BRCA1 mutations among breast cancer patients from the Bahamas. Breast Cancer Res Treat 2011; 125 (2): 591–596
- **“BLOW THE WHISTLE” ON BREAST CANCER PUBLIC AND PROVIDER EDUCATION CAMPAIGN:** Sister Sister Breast Cancer Support Group
- **“Ride for Hope” Family Island Mammography Screening Initiative**