

Breast cancer awareness

MAMMOGRAPHY is the gold standard in early detection of breast cancer, even before physical signs can be detected.

Breast cancer constitutes around 25% of all cancers in women and will affect 1 in 20 Namibian women in their lifetime. According to the National Namibia Cancer Registry (NNCR), breast cancer is the most common cancer in Namibia.

Early detection

Breast cancer continues to be the subject of intensive educational campaigns to encourage women of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds to subscribe to early detection and diagnosis.

As frightening as a cancer diagnosis is, the good news is that modern medical advances and early screening and diagnosis result in more women surviving and beating cancer, with less aggressive and invasive treatment required.

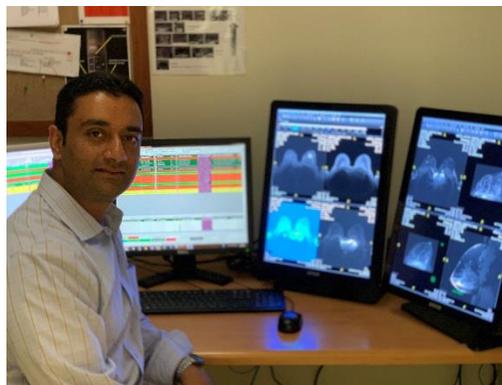
“The need for early and accurate detection simply cannot be over emphasized” says Dr Annelie Zietsman, oncologist at Windhoek Central Hospital. She further states: “If you get your treatment for breast cancer

before it reaches the size of 1 cm the overall survival is more than 90 %”.

The gold standard for breast cancer screening remains the mammogram. Depending on the density of the breast tissue, an ultrasound may also be performed by the radiologist. Early breast cancer detection through mammography enables less extensive surgery, fewer mastectomies, and less frequent or aggressive chemotherapy.

Modern techniques

The newer digital imaging equipment has the added advantage of tomosynthesis (slices taken through the whole breast that can be analyzed in 3D) performing even better in detecting early cancer. This technique also dramatically improves the accuracy of tissue sampling during stereotactic biopsy procedures.



MR Mammography is a very sophisticated and sensitive imaging modality for evaluation of complex cases. After one of our radiologist received training in Brigham Women’s Imaging Centre in Boston Massachusetts, Medical Imaging acquired the software and hardware equipment and has been performing the examination since 2008.

Initially, radiologists from Boston second read our studies for free. We have now performed close to 1000 MR mammograms and have 4 radiologists with special training in reporting of MR mammograms.





Prognosis

Breast cancers found during screening mammography / ultrasound are more likely to be small and still confined to the breast. The size of breast cancer and how far it has spread are two of the most important prognostic factors.

Confusing alternatives

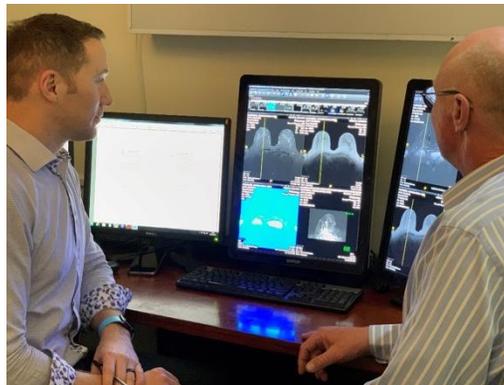
Women are often confronted to consider other “imaging techniques” such as thermography – the use of light emitting devices or systems that can “feel” masses. These imaging techniques are often operated by

personnel with no medical training and no sound knowledge of conventional breast imaging.

There is no evidence that these methods have any value in the screening and early detection of breast cancer. They may do more harm by missing breast cancers, thus leading to delayed diagnosis and limited treatment options.

Radiation risk

Women may be concerned about the radiation risk associated with mammography. The risk is negligible and is a fraction of the radiation that the public receives annually from the natural background radiation. It is also important to dispel the myth that the radiation from modern mammography can possibly produce breast cancer. There is no scientific evidence to support this.



Screening recommendation

The international recommendation is that women should undergo yearly mammograms, starting at the age of 40.

Women at high risk, e.g. history of breast cancer in a close family relative, should have annual mammograms and MRI starting at an age 5 years before the age their family member was diagnosed with breast cancer or at 30 years, whichever comes first. High risk is defined as a lifetime risk > 20-25%, and is calculated on every patient.

Biopsy benefit

Only 1-2% of women required a needle biopsy as a result of a screening mammogram. The short-term anxiety associated with a biopsy does not outweigh the long term benefits of prompt and accurate diagnosis.

Early detection campaign.

In support of Breast Health Awareness Month (October 2019) **Medical Imaging's "Namibian Women Love Yourself"** campaign offers a 10% discount on mammograms until 15 November 2019.

