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Breast Cancer in India - Worrying Trends and Way Forward

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Satyaki Banerjee, CEO - Kiran Medical Systems shares his views on breast cancer in India



Around the world, Breast Cancer rates are increasing at an alarming rate. In India, Breast Cancer has become the most common cancer in women. According to reports, one woman is diagnosed with Breast Cancer every 4 minutes & one woman dies of Breast Cancer every 13 minutes. About 46% of patients diagnosed with Breast Cancer fall in the category of 50 years or younger; whereas 25 years ago this bracket was 2%.

Research indicates, early screening can reduce the risk of mortality by 25-30% or more. With the increasing incidence of Cancer amongst younger women, early detection & prevention is the key to fight against Breast Cancer. It is emphasised that women should be made aware of symptoms of the disease and should report it early. Early diagnosis of the disease is imperative for cure and improving survival rate.

Effective Breast Cancer Screening

A screening test identifies the disease before there are any symptoms and therefore helps increasing the chances of effective & successful treatment. The first and one of the most vital steps in effective Breast Cancer screening is breast self-examination. It is essential for women to be familiar with how their breasts normally look and feel and report any changes. If practiced regularly, one learns to identify the difference between the abnormal new change and normal tissue in the breast.

However, for precise screening and diagnosis of Breast Cancer, mammogram is recommended. For high quality clinical images, a good mammography system is needed. With the latest Digital Mammography technology, the detection efficiency of invasive cancer has increased significantly.

In order to better characterize the breast lesions through a non-evasive evaluation, Breast Elastography is recommended. The final step in diagnosis is biopsy which helps in definitely determining if the tissues or fluid extracted from breast are cancerous or not.

Innovation –How new technologies can help?

A highly dense breast has a greater amount of glandular and connective tissue compared to fatand is considered a risk factor for cancer. With Digital Mammography, micro-calcifications are picked up easily, allowing for precise diagnosis. Digital Mammography Systems are being developed with the view of providing comfortable mammograms to the patients and easier for the care providers. Latest Digital Mammography systems are compatible to be installed in Screening Vans which will play a crucial role in screening women for breast cancer even in remotest parts of the country.

In western countries like US, out of every 100 women with breast cancer, 89 women are likely to survive. For India, this figure is not even more than 60% and almost 45-50% of patients in India are present in the advanced stages (Stage 3 and 4). US and European countries have achieved a steadily improving and good survival mainly because of effective screening of breast cancer. In India, there is an urgent need for expansion of breast cancer screening programs across the country to reduce the morality rate. With advanced technologies like Digital Mammography and Government’s initiatives on awareness& screening programs, Breast Cancer is a disease that can be conquered successfully.