



Breast cancer in the developing world: meeting the unforeseen challenge to women, health and equity
*An international meeting organized by the Harvard Global Equity Initiative, Dana Farber Cancer Institute, Harvard School of Public Health, Harvard Medical School and the Brigham and Women's Hospital
Boston, 3-5 November, 2009*

Breast Cancer: Confronting the Global Epidemic

Summary document prepared by Felicia Knaul based on the press release for the international seminar: Breast cancer in the developing world: meeting the unforeseen challenge to women, health and equity. Nov 4-5, 2009. Harvard University. Boston. MA.

Breast cancer is reaching epidemic proportions throughout the world. Globally, 1.35 million new cases of breast cancer will be diagnosed this year, accounting for 10.5 percent of all new cancer cases, second only to lung cancer.(1) An estimated 4.4 million women now live with diagnosed breast cancer -- the most prevalent cancer in the world. (2)

The incidence is projected to increase and the majority of cases will come from the developing world. Some 1.7 million new cases of breast cancer will be diagnosed in 2020 --- a 26% increase from current levels -- according to estimates by Harvard School of Public Health. (1)

Middle and low-income countries are catching up with the developed world, as infectious diseases and malnutrition decline and life spans improve. More than 55 percent of the more than 450,000 deaths expected this year from the disease will occur in these countries. (2) (3)

The United States is number one with 240,721 new cases of breast cancer expected this year. One in eight U.S. women will develop breast cancer at some time in their lives. The majority of these cases are detected and treated in early stages, when the 5-year survival rates are 98 percent, according to the American Cancer Society. (4)

Though the absolute numbers are smaller, the countries where the greatest percentage increase in breast cancer cases is projected over the next decade are: United Arab Emirates, 78 percent; Qatar, 60 percent; and Saudi Arabia, 57 percent. The largest absolute increases will be in Asia with almost 180,000 new cases in China in 2020 and 131,000 in India.(1)

In Latin America and the Caribbean alone, more than 40,000 women die each year of breast cancer and more than 117, 000 cases are reported, though epidemiologists believe these numbers are underestimated.(5) By 2020, there will be almost 154,000 new cases representing an increase of 31 percent, and a projected 52,500 deaths. The breast cancer mortality rate per 100,000 women in Argentina is 22; in Brazil is 14; and in Uruguay is 24.(1)

Women in the developing world are more likely to die of the disease. The probability of death – the case fatality rate – reflects inequities in early detection and access to treatment. The ratio of deaths to new cases is 56 percent in low-income, 39 percent in low-middle income and 44 percent in high-middle income developing countries. In the developed world it is still high, but much lower than in the developing world: 24 percent. (1)

The global cost of just the new cases of cancer in 2009 is an estimated \$286 billion, a figure that includes treatment, foregone income due to illness, and the costs of research. Breast cancer alone accounts for nearly \$28 billion, with costs in the United States alone topping \$16 billion. Thus, for breast cancer alone about \$26 billion additional would be needed in the developing world to bring low-survival country spending up to that of high-survival countries.(1)

Breast Cancer: Key Global Statistics

Breast Cancer	Most common cancer of women; accounts for 10.5% of all new cancer cases – second to lung
New cases in 2009	1.35 million
New cases in 2020 (estimated)	1.7 million
Deaths (estimate for 2009)	450,000
Women living with the illness (diagnosed)	4.4 million

Sources:

-Nancy Beaulieu, David Bloom, Lakshmi Bloom and Richard Stein (2009). Breakaway: The Global Burden of Cancer – challenges and opportunities. The Economist Intelligence Unit. Sponsored by the Livestrong Foundation.

-Peter Boyle and Bernard Levin eds. (2008). World Cancer Report, 2008. Lyon, France: World Health Organization and International Agency for Research on Cancer

New Breast Cancer Cases		
Low income	69,000	5%
Lower-middle income	415,000	31%
Upper-middle income	224,000	17%
High-income	615,000	46%
Total	1.35 million	100%

Source: Nancy Beaulieu, David Bloom, Lakshmi Bloom and Richard Stein (2009). Breakaway: The Global Burden of Cancer – challenges and opportunities. The Economist Intelligence Unit. Sponsored by the Livestrong Foundation.

Breast Cancer Deaths as a % of new cases, 2002	
Low income	56%
Lower-middle income	44%
Upper-middle income	39%
High-income	24%

Source: Nancy Beaulieu, David Bloom, Lakshmi Bloom and Richard Stein (2009). Breakaway: The Global Burden of Cancer – challenges and opportunities. The Economist Intelligence Unit. Sponsored by the Livestrong Foundation.

Sources:

- (1) Nancy Beaulieu, David Bloom, Lakshmi Bloom and Richard Stein (2009). Breakaway: The Global Burden of Cancer – challenges and opportunities. The Economist Intelligence Unit. Sponsored by the Livestrong Foundation.
- (2) Peter Boyle and Bernard Levin eds. (2008). World Cancer Report, 2008. Lyon, France: World Health Organization and International Agency for Research on Cancer
- (3) Porter P. Westernizing women's risk? Breast cancer in lower-income countries. New England Journal of Medicine 2008; 358:213–16.
- (4) American Cancer Society. Breast Cancer Facts & Figures 2009-2010. Atlanta: American Cancer Society, Inc.
- (5) Felicia Marie Knaul and Hector Arreola. Hoja de datos, Cáncer de mama: Tómatelo a Pecho. www.tomateloapecho.org.mx.