



Pan American
Health
Organization



World Health
Organization
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE
Americas



PERMANENT MISSION OF NEW ZEALAND
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

WOMEN AND CANCER

Cervical and Breast Cancer: Why prevention matters

CONCEPT NOTE 5th March 2014

Side event of CSW 58

Co-sponsored by CARICOM, New Zealand, PAHO/WHO and the NGO CSW Forum
14 March 2014, Conference Room C (CB), 3:00 – 4:15pm

CONTEXT

NCDs are the leading cause of death in women, killing a staggering 18 million women each year—exceeding that of communicable, maternal, perinatal and nutritional conditions combined.¹ Today, cervical and breast cancer cause an estimated 800,000 deaths each year, 70% of which occur in developing countries. Even in high-income countries, poor women have higher risks of cancer death due to unequal access to healthcare services that provide early detection and treatment.

Although NCDs pose a major threat to women's sexual and reproductive health, many women are unaware of health risks, methods of prevention or the need for early diagnosis for NCDs— a situation that is unacceptable, especially in the case of cancer of the cervix which is preventable. There continues to be a widespread myth that NCDs are an affliction of rich countries. The statistics tell a different story. For example, the Caribbean is the Region of the Americas worst affected by the epidemic of chronic disease, contributing to almost 50% of disability-adjusted life years lost in the Latin America/Caribbean Region.² NCDs are the leading cause of death in Pacific Island Countries, frequently accounting for over 70% of all deaths³.

A major omission in the MDGs was a special set of targets related to the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). WHO has recognized that NCDs affects national economies by inflicting debt and pushing millions of people below the poverty line, impeding progress to achieve MDG 1. Due to economic inequalities and their special role as unpaid caregivers, women carry the heaviest burden of NCDs whether they are personally affected, or a member of the household becomes ill.

¹ Global Status Report on Noncommunicable Diseases, 2010, WHO, Geneva 2011.

² http://www.caricom.org/jsp/community/chronic_non_communicable_diseases/alarming_facts.jsp

³ The Economic Costs of Non Communicable Diseases in the Pacific Islands, World Bank Report. Available from: <http://bit.ly/1ncNjwm>



ISSUES

Social determinants such as poverty and low levels of education lead to challenges and barriers for women who are affected by or susceptible to NCDs. Yet these inequities can be addressed through targeted policy and programmatic interventions such as universal access to health care services and strengthening of NCDs in primary health care.

Recent experiences throughout the developing world as well as developed countries have demonstrated that it is possible to reduce the mortality and morbidity caused by women's cancers. Innovative approaches exist to empower women with knowledge about preventing cancer, to increase access to screening and early diagnosis and for effective treatments. For example, progress in HPV vaccine introduction is notable, particularly with the GAVI Alliance's decision to include HPV vaccines among the selected developing countries that it supports.

Increased awareness of cancer through communications, information and education programs has helped spur innovations in public health programs to empower women to take care of their health, and to strengthen services for early detection and treatment. For example, in rural Thailand a program that included a health education component resulted in expanded coverage for cervical cancer screening by 70 % within 6 years of its implementation in the 54 villages of the district⁴.

Yet, challenges and obstacles to wider adoption persist such as securing an affordable price for sustained inclusion of the vaccine in national schedules, including in middle-income countries. Similar difficulties in resource mobilization exist to ensure access to screening tests, such as mammography screening for breast cancer and HPV DNA tests for cervical cancer.

Advocacy by women's organizations such as the Forum of African First Ladies Against Breast and Cervical Cancer is key. Still, much more awareness raising and advocacy, including by women's organizations, youth leaders, the media and civil society organizations is needed to inspire further policy changes and ensure women's right to health as a human right.

PURPOSE AND FORMAT

This side event aims to raise awareness of the challenges faced by women and girls who are affected by breast and cervical cancer, particularly those in developing countries. It will be solution focused and encourage the strengthening of health policies that can improve women's access to breast and cervical cancer prevention, screening and treatment. Delegations attending the CSW are invited to participate. Other participants will include civil society representatives, senior representatives of UN Agencies and international organizations concerned with women's health. This panel will have short presentations by experts and a cancer survivor followed by interactive dialogue with the audience. A brief summary of discussions will be prepared.

⁴ <http://www.ncdalliance.org/women>



PROGRAM

Invited Speakers

Opening remarks

Honourable Melanie Griffin, M.P., Minister of Social Services and Community Development
of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas

Panelists:

Dr. Jackie Blue, Human Rights Commissioner for Women and for Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, NZ Human Rights Commission, former Parliamentarian and breast physician.

Cancer survivor (to be decided)

Dr. Carissa Etienne, Director, Pan American Health Organization/WHO (video message)

Dr. Felicia Knaul, Director, Harvard Global Equity Initiative and Associate Professor, Harvard University School of Medicine

Discussant:

Dr. Mini Murthy, Director Global Health New York Medical College and MWIA NGO alternate representative to the UN, and other invited discussants

Moderator:

Dr. Karen Sealey, former Special Advisor on UN Matters and Partnerships, PAHO/WHO