

Start to know breast cancer

Proceeding

Health is wealth! True. As human ages, diseases occur. The modern era is witnessing a rise of another dreaded disease called CANCER. Cancer is one of the most horrifying diseases that can occur to humans. Not only it takes a heavy toll in terms of life, it is equally burdening for the patient mentally and emotionally. Cancer may virtually affect any organ of the body. International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), a WHO initiative, via its project GLOBOCON provides the figures for incidence, mortality and prevalence rates of various cancers in the world. The GLOBOCON 2012, published online, provides pooled data from 184 countries. According to the publication, breast cancer is ranked second in the list of most common cancers in the world. The analysis makes a striking contrast between USA and India. In the year 2012, 2.3lakhs cases of breast cancer were diagnosed in USA while 1.4lakhs in India. Shockingly, the death figures are more for India (43,000 and 70,000 approximately for USA and India respectively).¹ Why is this so? Is there drug shortage in India? Or are the doctors inefficient? A big resounding no. It is ignorance. In the routine busy lives, people ignore their health. It's always better having diagnosed with stage 1 cancer instead of stage 3 or, unfortunately, 4. Please see the figure below which highlights the magnitude of the problem being faced Figure 1.

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Breast cancer is a global disease. The scientists, researchers, clinicians and activists have joined hands together across the globe to fight against breast cancer. Various societies both scientific and for patient support have been found in this regard. Scientific committees keep an eye on various on-going clinical trials and formulate guidelines for providing the best possible treatment to patients. Pink ribbon story foundation, The Pink Initiative, Indian Cancer Society and Can-stop are some of the patient support groups that help the person at various stages of their treatment, all in financial, moral or emotional ways.

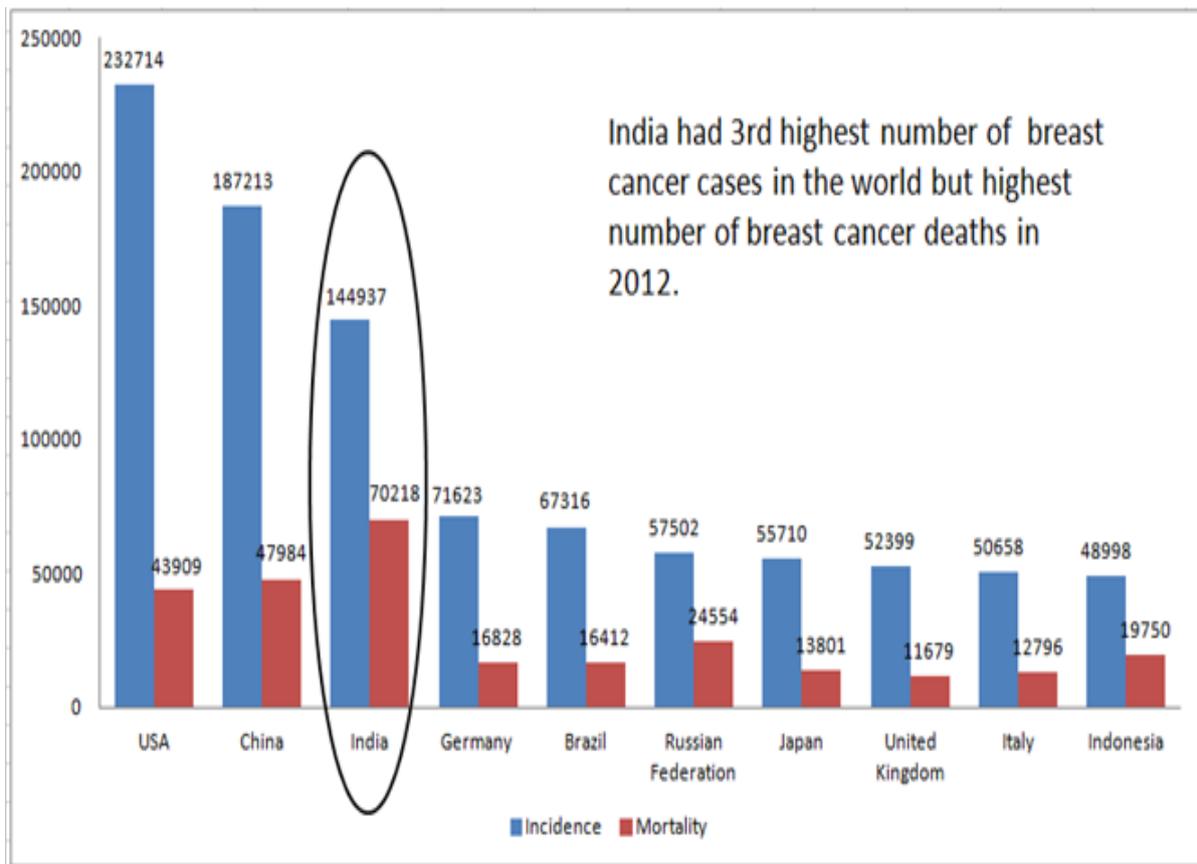


Figure 1 India has 3rd highest number of breast cancer in the world but highest number of breast cancer deaths in 2012.

Cancer is curable if detected early

Do I have breast cancer? Suspicion at home is a call to a nursing home. Lump in the breast, discharge from nipple, unusual skin thickening, colour changes and ulcer for a long time are the common symptoms for which patient consults a doctor. Any patient suspicious of having breast cancer undergoes physical examination by the doctor followed by mammography or ultrasound of breast and aspiration cytology or biopsy. The call for various investigations depends on the symptoms and physical examination of the patient.

What next? Breast cancer needs a team. The treatment of breast cancer includes permutation and combination of surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, targeted therapy and hormonal therapy in accordance to the character and stage of the disease. A patient should consult medical oncologist, on co-surgeon and radiation oncologist to understand the need and pros and cons of different treatment modalities. The decision for upper-stated treatment options are made by multidisciplinary experts. Is the treatment same for all patients? No, it's not. One shoe does not fit all. Individualization of patient's needs and personalization of treatment is of utmost importance. The

popular terminology "tumour board" takes into account the age of the patient, other disease/s (like hypertension, diabetes mellitus, heart disease, etc), performance status (judged by oncologist), stage (1 to 4) and character (hormone expression and Her-2neu status) of the tumour for deciding the final action plan for a patient. A stitch in time saves nine. Keeping in mind the rise in incidence of the breast cancer, any symptom should not be ignored and proper investigations should be carried out so that timely treatment can be provided to the patients.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

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