**One-woman army to defeat breast cancer in Pakistan**

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A dedicated doctor by profession and a philanthropist, Dr. ZubaidaQazi is the founder of Pink Pakistan Trust striving to improve the health and well-being of Pakistani women by fighting the ailment of breast cancer. She has tirelessly worked to improve the infrastructure of the public health system by devising a referral mechanism and ensuring the provision of much-needed counselling services to the breast cancer patients in Pakistan. Now, she is launching a mobile application in different local languages that will assist women to do self-screening for breast cancer as well as provide free of cost consultation with national and international specialist doctors and psychiatrists.

Factually speaking within every two minutes, a woman is diagnosed with breast cancer in the United States. Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in women behind lung cancer across the globe. Breast cancer is the most predominant kind of cancer among women worldwide. Every year, around one million women are diagnosed with Breast Cancer. According to data produced by the National Cancer Institute, an average of 2,319 new cases is diagnosed each year in the state of Texas. So, if this is the condition of the USA then just imagine the threat of this menace is developing countries. As per the American Cancer Society (ACS), deaths owing to breast cancer in the USA dropped 39 percent between 1989 and 2015.

Although it is good news credited to increasingly stable incidence rates and improved treatment, but there is still much work left to be done. In October 2020, various organizations working to fight against breast cancer has given a very powerful reminder that together we have the power to protect the most vulnerable section of society – the females – in a very big way. However, this is a collective efforts need to be initiated by all factions of society including politicians, bureaucrats, government, universities and colleges, and other public and private organizations to show our support to women that their life is important for all of us.

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According to the experts besides medication and proper treatment, prevention is the best armament in fighting this disease. However, the risk for breast cancer can be lowered with various lifestyle changes. They believe the women who avoid smoking, exercise, reduce alcohol and keep a healthy weight after menopause can lower their chances of developing the disease. As most of the medics believe, regardless, breast cancer is the deadly disease, but it can be survivable if diagnosed and treated early enough.

Now, see the case of South Asia especially in India alone, around a quarter of all cancers in women are breast cancers. Breast cancer has become a devastating diagnosis for any woman in India, but Indian governments have improved the treatment of the disease. Pakistan alone has the highest rate of Breast Cancer than any other country in Asia. Over 90000 females confront to breast cancer whereas 40000 females die each year due to breast cancer in Pakistan. Awareness and early diagnose cum treatment is imperative to improve breast cancer outcome and survival. So, it can be said safely that if the disease is diagnosed early, most of the women can be “cured” of this sort of cancer. The main key is to diagnose at earlier stages.

There are different opinions about the disease. However, medical science is motionless to give an exact cause as whey women suffer from this disease; but some risk patterns have been identified over the time and again. Some say most women who developed breast cancer are found over 50. Some believe there is an increasingly trend among younger women especially women who have started menses early (below 12 years) or women who have a late menopause (over 50 years), are at a slightly higher risk. Some medics believe that excessive intake of alcohol, smoking and gaining extra weight also increase the risk. A universal question is what are the symptoms of breast cancer in women? These include:

a) a lump in the breast

b) a change in the size or shape of the breast

c) dimpling of the skin or thickening in the breast tissue

d) a nipple that’s turned inwards

e) a rash on the nipple

f) discharge from the nipple

g) swelling or a lump in the armpit

There are multiple tests to detect the cancer. The doctors first examine the woman’s breast, and the lymph glands in the armpits and around the neck. The lymph glands are examined because this cancer usually spreads first to the lymph glands and then goes anywhere else. One of the first tests to detect breast cancer is a mammogram. It is a low-dose x-ray of the breast of the woman. Mammograms are usually useful in women over 40. The breast tissue has less fat comparatively in younger women, therefore, a mammogram cannot detect changes which appear in a woman’s body so easily. So, an ultrasound is used. This uses sound waves to build up a picture of the breast. Another test biopsy is done from the breast where the lump is present. In this test, some tissues are taken out and sent to the pathologist who confirms the presence of the cancer in breast or refute it.

Therefore, it can be argued with fair level of confidence that awareness is the mandatory element which must be created to sensitize females rather prepare them to take precautionary measures instead of fearing of it. Different medical societies, scientists, social activists and individuals are working to create this sort of awareness and even taking practical measures to prevent this disease in various parts and regions of the globe.

In Pakistan, there are various organizations working for the same cause. However, DrZubaidaQazi is the powerful voice articulating awareness treatment to prevent this disease. She believes it is a social stigma in Pakistan where a large part of patriarchal society starts fearing or even ignoring females suffering from breast cancer. “In fact, we must realize it is like other diseases in one of the parts of our body and it is curable if diagnosed at earlier stage,” DrZubaida believes. Here in Pakistan, there is a National Program for Early Detection of Breast Cancer through which every woman is trained in examining herself. Owing to such initiatives in western societies, this phenomenon has decreased significantly. Dr. Zubaida has launched a very fruitful awareness platform i.e., www.pinkpakistan.org.pk where she has summarized all her initiatives to fight with this disease. One can find details and information about awareness, early detection, process of treatment, counselling and support, research, social engagement, institutional capacity building program, technological integration, and medical facilities required to tackle this disease. According to Dr. Qazi, Pink Pakistan is cognizant of the fact that empowering the women of Pakistan will aid towards driving a force of change. The Pink Pakistan Trust aims to promote women empowerment particularly focusing on economic empowerment of the women of the marginalized community. To fulfil this goal and focus on the financial stability of women throughout the country, Pink Pakistan has established ties with Akhuwat, one of the world’s largest interest free microfinance organization, and multiple educational institutions such as Iqra University, Quaid-e-Azam University, Karachi University, Allama Iqbal University and Jinnah SMC University. The organizations have found similarities in interests and aim to help the underprivileged community in Pakistan. These organizations and institutions aid Pink Pakistan in through volunteer programs, joint researches, community engagements, and training and capacity building. Pink Pakistan is determined to eradicate the economic hardships of women by concentrating on the following focal points:

1) Skills Based Training

2) Entrepreneurial Training

3) Venture Capital, Training and Microfinance

Truly speaking, Dr. Zubaida is the ray of hope for the females suffering from this menace. Dr. Qazi has entered into agreements with various educational as well social institutions to prevent this cause. The institutes include: University of Karachi, ICCBS, HEJ, Quaid-e-Azam University, Akhuwat, Government College University, Lahore, Allama Iqbal Open University, University of Lahore, Benazir Women University Peshawar, Markz-e-Umeed, COMSTECH, Essa Laboratories and others. Meanwhile, she has established nine breast cancer awareness centers in the slums of Karachi district, KU, Benazir University for Women, Peshawar. She is further developing an international alliance with COMSTECH of Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) to create the awareness about breast cancer in the Islamic countries. She is committed to mobilizing the community and taking all the stakeholders on board to provide holistic support for the well-being and welfare of Pakistani women. Now, being Pakistani, let we collectively need to think over it that if a one woman can do this all then can’t we all Pakistani step in and work shoulder-to-shoulder to prevent this disease affecting our women owing to whom the beauty of this world exits?

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