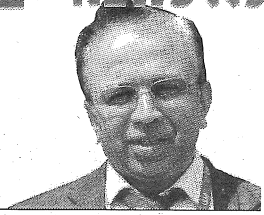


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Helping women know about breast cancer

AS Breast Cancer Awareness Month starts today, the need to raise awareness remains a challenge, particularly in our region where we have a high minority ethnic population as well as extreme poverty.

It is the most common form of cancer in women, with around 55,000 new cases diagnosed a year – a number that is ever-growing.

The NHS Breast Cancer Screening programme was introduced in England in 1988. Women aged between 50 and 70 are invited for screening every three years. However, those between 47-49 and 71-73 may be invited for as part of age extension of the programme. Women between 71-74 can also self-refer for screening.

In Greater Manchester and London, we unfortunately have one of the lowest uptake rates for breast cancer screening, and these uptake rates are declining. For example, in 2011/12, just 68 per cent of eligible women in Greater Manchester and 63 per cent in London attended their breast screening appointments against a national average of 73 per cent. In Greater Manchester, this has reduced further in 2012/13 to just 66.87 per cent. Breast screening attendance is particularly low among women in inner city and deprived areas, and even more so in minority ethnic communities.

The 68 per cent who attended for screening is an average figure and hides the fact that there are huge disparities in Greater Manchester.

For example, relatively prosperous and predominantly caucasian areas have much higher screening uptake whilst minority ethnic communities and inner city areas have much lower screening uptake rates.

These breast screening appointments are important as we can pick up

breast cancer in its early stages on mammograms, thereby greatly increasing the chances of successfully treating the cancer. The reasons for poor screening uptake are complex but essentially hinge around lack of more culturally and linguistic specific information and greater engagement of these communities.

The irony is that breast cancer incidences have been increasing in the Asian population due to a change in lifestyle and are now approaching the rates seen in the caucasian population.

Breast cancer also peaks at a younger age of 45 in Asian women as compared to caucasian women. Hence there is greater need for minority ethnic women to be breast aware and go and see their GP if they feel any breast lump. They certainly should not ignore their screening appointments.

In 2011, I launched the Asian Breast Cancer Support Group at the Nightingale Centre and Genesis Prevention Centre, based at the University Hospital of South Manchester NHS Foundation Trust.

The group is collaboration between patients, carers, interested lay people and health professionals. The main aim is to raise greater breast cancer awareness in Asian communities.

Two years on, the group has made considerable progress in raising greater breast cancer awareness, providing a platform for Asian women to meet with each other and share their experiences, as well as speak to various health professionals involved in breast care.

The Asian Breast Cancer Support Group has its next meeting on October 18, 1pm-5pm. To attend, please contact Saima Rashid at 0161 2914 400 or saima.rashid@genesisk.org