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Home » [Healthcare](#) » Study highlights barriers to treating breast cancer among women in Doha

0 Monday, 29 Apr 2013

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## [Study highlights barriers to treating breast cancer among women in Doha](#)

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A study recently published in Avicenna, an open access peer reviewed Journal from QScience.com and headed by **Dr. Tam Truong Donnelly** of the [University of Calgary-Qatar](#), revealed that women in Qatar often seek medical treatment for breast cancer symptoms in late stages of the disease.

The study highlights a direct statistical link between early detection of breast cancer by prescreening and improved prognosis and shows a low rate of participation in prescreening among Arabic women in Qatar. The Qatar-based research team has embarked on a three-year investigation of local mindsets and ways to encourage more prescreening among women in Qatar and the Middle East.

Commenting on the study, Dr. Donnelly said that "It is widely understood throughout the medical community and many parts of the world that early detection greatly improves the prognosis in breast cancer patients," he added that "We want to understand why women in Qatar are not aware of or participating in prescreening activities and what culturally-appropriate and effective strategies will help change this."

According to the study, the causes of breast cancer can be many and are difficult to assess case-by-case. In addition to genetic predisposition, the rising incidence rate in Qatar may be associated with lifestyle factors such as fatty diets, physical inactivity, smoking, and low rate of breastfeeding. "Over the past decade, Qatar has undergone tremendous change socially," Dr.Donnelly said, adding that "Adoption of a western lifestyle as well as improvements in healthcare and higher levels of awareness and screening around cancer can all factor into the increased reported rate of the disease. In any case, we need to do more now to promote healthy lifestyle and to lower its mortality rate because women here are facing a great threat."

Joining Dr. Donnelly in the study are Chairman of [Hamad Medical Corporation's](#) Medical Research Center **Dr. Al-Hareth Al-Khater**, from the [Supreme Council of Health](#) **Dr. Mohamed Al Kuwari**, Executive Director of HMC's Department of Nursing **Dr. Nabila Al-Meer**, Senior Consultant of hematology/oncology at Al-Anal Hospital **Dr. Salha Bujassoun**, Director of Primary Health Care at Qatar's Supreme Council of Health **Dr. Maryam Abdul Mallik**, Senior Consultant at HMC's Medical Research Center **Dr. Rajvir Singh**, Research Associate at the University of Calgary-Qatar Floor **Christie-de Jong** and a team of research assistants.

The team will conduct phase one of the study over three years, which began in March of 2011. The team aims to gather interview data to better understand the breast health experience of Arabic women and to find effective ways to promote breast cancer screening in Qatar. Following that, the team will look into implementing strategies that assist women in participating in breast cancer screening techniques self examination, clinical examination, and mammogram that are shown to markedly improve the chances of early detection and similarly the prognosis among those breast cancer patients. In the final stage, the team will monitor the effectiveness of the strategies and further facilitate them in order to sustain and increase participation of Arabic women in breast cancer screening.

Through talking with the women in Qatar and learning about their level of awareness and their thoughts around breast cancer and its screening, we hope to educate and transform fears into a sense of empowerment showing them that their actions can save their lives, that the disease is not the only deciding factor in survival," Dr. Donnelly said. In addition to talking with the women, Arabic men and health care providers in Qatar will also be asked to provide information on how best to support women to combat breast cancer.

Breast cancer is the most common type of cancer worldwide and the incidence is increasing, according to the study. The study also cites statistics from Qatar's National Cancer Disease Registry and the WHO showing that breast cancer is by far the most common cancer among women in Qatar and that the incidence and mortality rates are higher than any other type of cancer in the country. .

While the increase in breast cancer in developed countries has risen markedly over the past several decades, the study showed that in these countries, it has stabilized or risen only slightly in recent years. Yet the rate in Middle Eastern countries continues to rise, and Qatar is no exception, falling only slightly behind Kuwait and Jordan and significantly surpassing rates in Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

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