Cancer Council Queensland

Female breast cancer in Queensland 1982 to 2006 – summary

Cancer Council Queensland has published a report titled *Current Status of Female Breast Cancer in Queensland, 1982 to 2006*. It was produced by the Viertel Centre for Research in Cancer Control and presents the most recent data released by the Queensland Cancer Registry. The report provides an in-depth description of breast cancer statistics in Queensland, including screening activity, the number of females diagnosed with breast cancer, the length of time they survive after being diagnosed and the number of deaths caused by breast cancer. Trends over time, geographical differences within Queensland and national and international comparisons are also provided.

What causes breast cancer?

- The main factors shown to increase a woman's risk of being diagnosed with breast cancer include ageing, a family history of breast cancer, reproductive and hormonal factors (such as not having children, not breastfeeding, menstrual period beginning at a young age and menopause occurring at an older age), higher density of breast tissue, personal history of benign breast disease, being overweight or obese, excessive alcohol consumption and insufficient physical activity.

What is breast cancer screening?

- Breast cancer screening using mammography is a population-based public health program that is designed to screen asymptomatic women for breast cancer every two years. The aim of screening is to detect tumours at an early stage before they begin to spread, thereby improving the patient's prospects of recovery.
- A total of 202,437 women were screened by BreastScreen Queensland during 2007.
- Women in the target age group (50-69 years) had a participation rate of 56% over the two year period 2006-2007.

How many women are diagnosed with breast cancer?

- In 2006 there were 2,491 women diagnosed with breast cancer in Queensland.
- Breast cancer was the most commonly diagnosed cancer among females, accounting for 27% of all new diagnoses between 2002 and 2006.
- Around three quarters (74%) of breast cancers were diagnosed among women aged 50 years and over. The median age at diagnosis was 58 years, which is comparatively young compared to most other types of cancer.
- Almost half (47%) of the breast cancers diagnosed in Queensland were detected early (Stage I).
- A total of 26,361 women living in Queensland at the end of 2006 had been diagnosed with breast cancer at some time during the previous 25 years, and 40% (10,565) of these cases had been diagnosed within the last five years.

What are the survival rates among women with breast cancer?

- Compared to the general population, 98% of women diagnosed with breast cancer survived for at least one year, and 89% survived for at least five years.
- Stage at diagnosis has a large influence on breast cancer survival. Women diagnosed with Stage I tumours had a 5-year relative survival rate of 98%, compared to 83% for women with more advanced breast cancers (Stages II/III/IV) and 50% for women whose cancer stage was unknown at diagnosis.

How many women die from breast cancer?

- There were 432 deaths due to breast cancer among women in Queensland during 2006.
- Between 2002 and 2006 breast cancer caused 15% of all cancer-related deaths among females, ranking second behind lung cancer (17%).

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- Most breast cancer deaths (85%) occurred among women aged 50 years and over, with a median age at death of 66 years.
- On average, women who died from breast cancer lost 14 years of normal life expectancy.

How much have breast cancer statistics changed over time?

- The number of women diagnosed with breast cancer in Queensland each year almost tripled from 861 in 1982 to 2,491 in 2006. Some of this increase was due to population growth and ageing. After adjusting for changes in the population, the incidence rate for breast cancer still increased throughout the 1980s and 1990s, but has remained fairly steady since then.
- Survival for women diagnosed with breast cancer has improved significantly over the last two decades, with 5-year relative survival increasing from 74% between 1982-1988 to 89% between 2001-2006.
- The annual number of deaths caused by breast cancer increased from 261 in 1982 to 432 in 2006. However, after adjusting for population growth and ageing, the corresponding mortality rate has actually been decreasing by almost 3% per year since the mid 1990s.

How does Queensland compare with interstate and overseas?

- The incidence of breast cancer in Queensland was similar to the national average, while Australia had the twelfth highest incidence rate of breast cancer among developed countries.
- There was little variation in breast cancer mortality rates for most States and Territories within Australia, including Queensland. From an international perspective, the mortality rate for Australia was close to the average among developed countries.
- Survival rates for women diagnosed with breast cancer in Queensland were similar to the rest of Australia, and were higher than those reported in many other countries throughout the world.

Are there any geographic differences within Queensland?

- Breast cancer incidence rates were highest among women living in major cities and those from the most affluent areas of Queensland.
- Women from these areas also had higher survival rates for breast cancer compared to women who lived in either remote parts of Queensland or in areas that were socio-economically disadvantaged.
- Most of the variation throughout Queensland in breast cancer incidence was due to differences in the incidence rate of Stage I tumours, with only small regional differences in advanced or unknown stage breast cancers. Adjustment of survival by stage accounted for some, but not all, of the area-based variation in survival.

The full report is available at www.cancerqld.org.au/research/vcrcc/vcrccpublications.htm or by contacting research@cancerqld.org.au for more details.

An online version of the graphs contained in the report, along with corresponding information for a range of other types of cancer is available at: www.cancerqld.org.au/research/QCSOL.asp

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