

# TerranearPMC Safety Share

## **Week of October 8, 2012 – October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month**

Last week, while watching Monday Night Football, it was hard not to notice the players from both the Chicago Bears and Dallas Cowboys wearing pink shoes, socks, and gloves. Today, when we see this type of colorful solidarity, we automatically understand its significance as this particular color, when worn in such a display, signifies that it is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. That day was just the first day of October, and, without a doubt, as this month moves forward, we will see more things that will remind us of the important message for which October is now associated. Indeed, it is just amazing that through the efforts of a group of determined people over a few decades, we all know what the illuminating pink accessories has come to symbolize.

**National Breast Cancer Awareness Month (NBCAM)**, was founded in 1985 and is an annual international health campaign organized by major breast cancer charities every October to increase awareness of the disease and to raise funds for research into its cause, prevention, diagnosis, treatment and cure. The campaign also offers information and support to those affected by breast cancer. One organization, *Susan G. Komen for the Cure*, which started in 1982 (named after the founder's sister, who died of this disease in 1980), has been credited with starting the tradition of wearing pink ribbons to increase public awareness. The following year, in October 1983, the now famous *Race for the Cure* (also organized by the *Susan G. Komen for the Cure*) was held for the first time. It was in Dallas, Texas, where 800 people participated. According to the organizers, by 2002 the number of participants reached 1.3 million and the event was held in over 100 US cities. Today this event has millions of participants and is observed on the international stage.

While quite rare, male breast cancer does exist (making up less than 1% of all breast cancer cases), and due to its strong association as a feminine medical concern, admitting contracting this disease is somewhat stigmatized, resulting in going unreported. However, In 2009 the male breast cancer advocacy groups *Out of the Shadow of Pink*, *A Man's Pink*, and the *Brandon Greening Foundation for Breast Cancer in Men* joined together to globally establish the third week of October as "Male Breast Cancer Awareness Week." Men possess a small amount of nonfunctioning breast tissue (breast tissue that cannot produce milk) that is concentrated in the area directly behind the nipple on the chest wall. Like breast cancer in women, cancer of the male breast is the uncontrolled growth of the abnormal cells of this breast tissue.

Cancer can happen to anyone. It is not bound by age, gender, or ethnic group. But among women, breast cancer is the most common form of the disease. Women in the U.S. have a one in eight chance of developing invasive breast cancer during their lifetime. And the American Cancer Society estimates that more than 1 million women in the U.S. have breast cancer and don't know it.

Invasive breast cancer is cancer that spreads outside the membrane of the lobule or duct into the breast tissue. The cancer can then spread into the lymph nodes in the armpit or beyond. When breast cancer cells are found in other parts of the body, the cancer is called metastatic breast cancer. There two most common types of invasive breast cancer include:

**Invasiveductal carcinoma (IDC):** With IDC, cancer cells start in a milk duct, break through the duct walls, and then invade fatty breast tissue. IDC can remain localized, which means it stays near the site where the tumor originated. However, the cancer cells may enter the bloodstream or lymphatic system and metastasize

-- spread -- anywhere in the body. IDC is the most common type of invasive breast cancer and accounts for more than 80% of invasive cancers.

**Infiltrating (invasive) lobular carcinoma (ILC):** This cancer accounts for about 10% to 15% of invasive breast cancers. ILC starts in the lobules or milk glands. It then spreads in a way similar to IDC. With ILC, most women feel a mass or thickening instead of a breast lump.

While most breast cancers begin in the breast ducts or tubes that connect the lobules to the nipple, other cancers can initiate in the glands or even breast tissues. In its early stages, breast cancer usually has no symptoms. As a tumor develops, one may note the following signs:

- A lump in the breast or underarm that persists after the menstrual cycle. This is often the first apparent symptom of breast cancer. Lumps associated with breast cancer are usually painless, although some may cause a prickly sensation. Lumps are usually visible on a mammogram long before they can be seen or felt.
- Swelling in the armpit.
- Pain or tenderness in the breast. Although lumps are usually painless, pain or tenderness can be a sign of breast cancer.
- A noticeable flattening or indentation on the breast, which may indicate a tumor that cannot be seen or felt.
- Any change in the size, contour, texture, or temperature of the breast. A reddish, pitted surface like the skin of an orange could be a sign of advanced breast cancer.
- A change in the nipple, such as a nipple retraction, dimpling, itching, a burning sensation, or ulceration. A scaly rash of the nipple is symptomatic of *Paget's disease*, which may be associated with an underlying breast cancer.
- Unusual discharge from the nipple that may be clear, bloody, or another color. It's usually caused by benign conditions but could be due to cancer in some cases.
- A marble-like area under the skin.
- An area that is distinctly different from any other area on either breast.

It should be mentioned that controversy does exist with the basic message of NBCAM. The Cancer Prevention Coalition has voiced criticism of NBCAM because the organization focuses on "early detection and treatment" while ignoring environmental factors. According Aaron Blair, Ph.D., chief of the Occupational Epidemiology Branch in National Cancer Institute's Division of Cancer Epidemiology and Genetics, hormone use is a major factor for an increased risk. On another front, the drug, chemical, and biotechnology industries have been accused of having a vested interest in treating the disease rather than finding ways to minimize its rate of incidence. Recent studies show that breast cancer is linked to several environmental and genetic factors which can be controlled or mitigated.

Regardless of the controversies, NBCAM lets us know that the devastation that breast cancer (as well as all other forms of this disease) is a battle that needs to be won and that those affected should not bear their burden in solitude. October has become the voice that rings throughout the year, giving victims the strength to reach out and knowing a supporting hand will be there.

***"Every person should be treated with the deference and respect you would show your best customer"***— Nancy Goodman Brinker (Founder of Susan G. Komen for the Cure)