



“Tell a friend....”

## Take the discomfort of examining your breast and enjoy life by preventing breast cancer.

By: Jovel Johnson

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month and the signs are everywhere for women, especially young women, to pay special attention to themselves as it relates to changes in their breasts. Advertisements, television shows and radio programmes pound information in our heads to be more aware and responsible, as early detection is key.

The Jamaica Cancer Society's (JCS) main purpose is to help people who are diagnosed with and surviving any form of cancer. This being Breast Cancer Awareness month, this non-profit organization has gone into overdrive to get women to be more vigilant in the fight against breast cancer.



Under this year's theme, 'Tell a friend', they educate women how to detect abnormalities themselves and how to take better charge of their health. "The Jamaica Cancer Society has been going on for many years now. We have done several things to heighten awareness, and with this year's theme, 'Tell a friend', we plan to let the news spread by word of mouth, seeing that word of mouth is one of the strongest forms of advertising," said Marva Lee, Administrative Director of JCS. "Early detection can reduce impact of the cancer and there is a three step process that can help to reduce the impact. There is Self Examination where you exam yourself, there is the Clinical Breast Examination where instead of you examining yourself, you come to the clinic, and there is also the Mammogram where women over 40 do their yearly examinations," Mrs. Lee said. She said that the JCS has been on many programmes on television and has put many articles in the newspapers as a way to make women aware.

Yvonne Watson, Mammography Manager and Outreach Co-ordinator of the JCS, said that the number of women who actually come in to do their mammograms is disturbing. "Only 4% of women that should be doing mammograms actually do them. That is not good, because early detection is very important. Jamaica has one of the highest mortality rates of breast cancer worldwide - 53.5 per hundred thousand over the age of 35 are diagnosed with breast cancer each year. That is 43 per hundred thousand of the population. This is a very large amount and it is important for the public to know this," Mrs. Watson said. The cancer registry is done every five years.

### What is a mammogram?

"It is a specialized soft tissue X-Ray of the breast. It's like any X-Ray but for a softer part of the body which shows what's going on in the breast. It is the single most important way of finding abnormalities and it is the most effective. It can pick up any abnormalities two years before it is detected," Mrs. Watson said. She said that the normal age to get a mammogram done is over 40 years. "But if a 20-year-old finds abnormalities, then she can have a mammogram done," she said. At that time, the 20-year-old would do a diagnostic mammogram, which is different from a normal screening mammogram, in that, it is a mammogram which is primarily to diagnose an abnormal lump which has been



A mammogram examination in progress.

detected in the young woman. A screening mammogram is one that is normally done on a yearly basis. She also said that if the cancer is hereditary, than a woman in that family would have to do a mammogram 10 years earlier than the youngest person diagnosed with the cancer. That is, if the youngest person was diagnosed at the age of 35, then that woman would have to start screening at age 25. "There was a girl, Tameka Thompson, who was diagnosed before her 17th birthday. She is now 22 years old and still going strong," she said.

### What to expect

"We ask that when they are coming in to do a mammogram, that powder not be put on the breast. The powder will simulate abnormalities that may be found in the breast and this can give false readings. When they come, we ask them to disrobe and a breast is placed on the receptacle. We pass X-Ray through the breast and a photograph of the image is recorded on the cassette. The film is then taken to the dark room to assess the results," Mrs. Watson explained. She continued, "Four photos are taken - two in the front position and two from the side position. This is done to get full coverage of the breast and the breast is compressed. She explained that because the breast will be compressed, there is going to be some discomfort. "I won't lie, it is uncomfortable, but I always say that it is better to stand the discomfort for just a few minutes and feel good or a lifetime. The procedure is pretty accurate and you will get a proper reading, so you it will put your mind at ease," Mrs. Watson said.

Mrs. Watson reiterated the fact that the JCS has done a lot to make the public aware. "We've been getting more coverage in the media. Also, we have the Mobile Mammography Programme that has a truck that goes island wide, especially in rural Jamaica - places where people would be less likely to be socially aware. People don't have to come to us, we will go into business places and talk to them," she said.

### Breast Self Examination (BSE)

It is strongly advised that as soon as a woman becomes 20 years old, she starts doing a breast self examination. Hazel Mitchell, nurse at the JCS screening lab explains the techniques of the BSE. "You can stand up or lie flat. The BSE should be done once each month beginning at age 20 and continue each month. Women who are menstruating should do the BSE from a few to days to a week after menstruation has ended. Women who are no longer menstruating (that is, experiencing menopause) should do their BSE on the same day each month. Women who are using oral contraceptives are encouraged to do their BSE each month on the day they begin a new pack of pills. All this is because of the hormones," she said.

### Patterns of examination

There is no one way to do the BSE and Ms. Mitchell explained the different patterns of examination. "There are three patterns of examination; the vertical of up and down where the entire breast is covered and the spiral, or ring pattern which is making concentric rings that tightens in a spiral starting on the outer edges of the breast and ending at the nipple. The third pattern is the wedge pattern which is going from inside to outside," she said. With the wedge pattern,



The Mobile Mammography Unit is a part of a programme that has the vehicle travelling islandwide, especially to rural areas, to educate women about the self breast examination and breast cancer.

Continued on Page 19

# Examining your breast

Continued from page 18

she explained, women should use three levels of pressure (light, medium and firm) while performing the BSE. She also said that women should use small massaging circles when palpating the breast and they should not lift the fingers while feeling the breast to ensure that no area is missed. "They are advised to do the examination when they are soapy or wet. This will help to feel any abnormal lumps easier than when the skin is dry," she said.

She stated that there are many causes of breast cancer: stress, diet and it can also be hereditary. "It is said that chicken skin can be a factor because of the hormones that are in the chicken and the different fertilizers in other foods," she said. She also outlined the risks of having breast cancer. This includes having the first child at age 30 (that is women who wait until they are 30 years old or older to have children), never having children and obesity. "This all involve hormones. Cancer feeds on hormones," Ms. Mitchell said.

## FAMPLAN RAISES AWARENESS

"We are creating awareness and we encourage women to do the test," said Paulette Pennant, Programme Administrator and Counselor at the Jamaica Family Planning (FAMPLAN) in St. Ann's Bay. "There are nurses that take them through the procedure and tell them what the Mammogram is all about. We show films and discuss what the films are about after watching them. We are not doing anything outside though. Everything is done at the clinic level and we don't have the staff to go out," she said. Regardless of that, they help to make the public aware, especially among the younger crowd. "We teach them how to do the examinations. It is a daily thing and that means continuous reinforcement," she said.

Mrs. Pennant said that older women will usually come in for information and they will get encouragement to do the screenings. "We are saying to young women to go and get screening because they think that only older women can get the cancer. As a youth friendly clinic, we will fully cater to them," she said.

The St. Ann's Bay Hospital is one place where a Mammogram can be done. It is done at the hospital every Monday. A private patient will have to pay \$2,200 and for health centre and otherwise, it will cost \$1,600.

With information about breast cancer everywhere, it is important for women to know that breast cancer can happen to anyone. There is a myth that only people whose relatives have it or older women can get it.



**JAMAICAN**  
**souvenirs**  
OCHO RIOS  
beach towels  
*Sun Island*  
926-1330-4 or 1-888-SUNISLE  
Kingston Uptown & Downtown  
Mandeville • Montego Bay • Ocho Rios • Negril

## LOANS LOANS LOANS

PERSONAL, BUSINESS, SALARY

Weekly, monthly or balloon repayments  
APPLIANCES AND FURNITURE ACCEPTED  
SOME LOANS WITHOUT COLLATERAL  
SMALL TRADERS & SELF EMPLOYED  
CALL 974-0749/7825 OR VISIT  
42 Ocean Village Plaza, Ocho Rios  
Office also at Montego Bay  
Tel: 971-1213/971-3316