

Too many women still dying from breast cancer, says charity

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Thousands of women die from breast cancer each year because current treatments are not always effective and in some cases fail to stem the disease, warns Breast Cancer Campaign today.

In a comprehensive review of breast cancer research published today, 56 of the UK's most influential breast cancer experts have identified the key research gaps and priorities for the greatest potential impact on patients.

Breast cancer treatment has improved over the past few decades and led to increased survival rates and better quality of life, the report highlights. However over 44,000 women in the UK are diagnosed with breast cancer each year and around 12,500 will die.

Unfortunately, not enough is known about why treatments don't work for some patients or why breast cancer can return, sometimes many years later, says Breast Cancer Campaign.

The new study, one of the largest ever carried out in the UK and published by the open access journal Breast Cancer Research, is a unique insight into the current state of breast cancer research and its future challenges.

Gaps in key areas of breast cancer research have been identified in the report, says the charity: prevention, detection, spread or recurrence of the disease, treatment, pathology, physiology, genetics and psychosocial aspects of breast cancer.

Among the recommendations for future research priorities pinpointed by Breast Cancer Campaign:

- Identify new ways to predict and prevent breast cancer
- Predict who will develop advanced or secondary disease
- Determine how and why breast cancer spreads to other parts of the body
- Devise a suitable method to determine the effectiveness of a treatment at an early stage
- Understand more about the psychosocial and psychological impacts of breast cancer

Pamela Goldberg, Chief Executive Breast Cancer Campaign said, "Breast cancer research has made considerable progress over the past two decades and vital work is still underway. But there are still significant knowledge gaps.

"Greater attention must be paid to all stages of breast cancer. The experiences of older women and those from minority ethnic groups must be considered, particularly in light of recent research showing breast cancer develops earlier in black women and their survival rates are poorer."

Breast Cancer Campaign is already playing a leading role in filling some of the research gaps identified in the report. The charity is currently spending £11.3 million on over 90 research projects around the UK, looking at all areas from screening and prevention to genetics and treatment.

The development of a computer programme that will quickly tell clinicians which is the best treatment for an individual is just one of the many research projects funded by the charity.

Accurately identifying who will respond, or not respond, to breast cancer treatments is very difficult. The computer programme will be able to predict which patients will benefit most, not only from current treatments, but also any new therapies that may come onto the market, paving the way for treatment tailored to the individual and ultimately saving lives.

“We have set out a blueprint for future breast cancer research by this analysis and we are already filling some of the gaps,” says Pamela Goldberg.

“While we are working in an exciting age of discovery, our resources are limited. The Government, funding bodies and scientists should focus on these gaps to drive advances in knowledge into improvements in patient care. If we co-ordinate our resources and target the priorities in breast cancer research, we can ensure an environment of scientific excellence and plug these gaps.”

Source: BioMed Central

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