

## **Breast Health Among Women At Eikwe, Western Region Ghana – Breast Cancer Awareness Month**

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### **Introduction**

Every **October** marks **Breast Cancer Awareness Month (BCAM)** to celebrate advances in new research into the detection and diagnosis, prevention, and treatment breakthroughs of breast cancer which could one day lead to a cure for the disease, to highlight the challenges that breast cancer poses and generally to raise awareness about the disease. The Breast Cancer Awareness Month for this year began on Friday, October 1, 2021 and ends on Sunday, October 31, 2021.

### **Cancer and Breast Cancer**

**Cancer** is a broad term for a class of diseases characterized by abnormal cells that grow and invade healthy cells in the body. **Breast cancer** starts when the cells of the breast begin to grow out of control. These cancer cells can then invade surrounding body tissues and spread to other parts of the body (NBCF, 2021). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), breast cancer is the most common cancer among women worldwide (WHO, 2020).

Every 74 seconds a woman dies of breast cancer. Studies have shown that breast cancer is more frequent in the left breast than in the right breast of women. When breast cancer is detected early, the survival rate is 99%. Globally, breast cancer occurs in less than 1% of men (CDC, 2021). The prevalence of breast cancer in Ghana up to the year 2020 stood at 18.7% (Globocan, 2020).

## **Risk factors of Breast Cancer**

Studies shows that the cause of breast cancer is unknown but there are diverse risks factors that can result in breast cancer. These risks are **modifiable** (can be prevented) and **non-modifiable** (cannot be prevented).

### **Non-modifiable risk factors include;**

1. Being a woman
2. Older age (> 50 years)
3. Genetic mutations (BRCA1 or BRCA2 genes)
4. Reproductive history
5. Family history of breast cancer
6. Previous treatment using radiation therapy

### **Modifiable risk factors include;**

1. Physical inactivity
2. Overweight or obesity after menopause
3. Intake of hormones
4. Use of certain oral contraceptives
5. Intake of alcohol
6. Smoking

## **Symptoms of Breast Cancer**

The first noticeable symptom of breast cancer is appearance of a lump (an abnormal thickened enlargement) that feels different from the rest of the breast tissue. Other signs include;

1. Thickening of breast tissue
2. One breast becoming larger or lower
3. A nipple changing position or shape or becoming inverted
4. A rash on or around a nipple
5. Discharge from nipple(s)
6. Constant pain in part of the breast or armpit
7. Peeling, flaking or scaling of the skin of the breast or nipple
8. Swelling beneath the armpit or around the collarbone (NBCF, 2021).

## **Research**

In a **recent study** (September, 2021) by some **faculty members** and a **student** of the **Department of Nursing and Midwifery (DoNM), Pentecost University (PU)** on **Breast health practices among women in Eikwe in the Western region of Ghana**, results from the study reveal worrisome gaps in the attainment of breast health in Ghana.

Eikwe is a small fishing town in the south east of the Ellembelle district of Nzema in the Western region of Ghana. The town is situated in Axim. It is located after Sanzule-Krisan and is a branch road off the Esiama-Elubo road. It shares boundaries with Krisan and Sanzule to the West and Ngalekpole to the East. Its geographical coordinates are 4°58'00" North, 2°28'47" West and altitude 15m. (<https://www.maplandia.com/ghana/western/axim/eikwe>; personal communication).

The study sought to determine the knowledge of breast diseases and the risk factors of developing these breast diseases, to determine the knowledge of breast self-examination (BSE) and to determine the extent of breast screening practices [BSE, clinical breast examination (CBE) and mammography] among a sample of 100 women in Eikwe.

Findings showed that all the women (100%) knew that the breast could be exposed to diseases and more than three-quarters (>75%) were able to mention some breast diseases including fibroadenoma, duct ectasia, breast abscess/infections, mastitis and breast cancer. However, about half of the women (47%) did not know the causes or the risk factors to the diseases they mentioned. Also, about (91%) had heard about BSE but more than (>80%) did not know how to perform BSE. Moreover, regarding the extent of breast screening practices, all the women (100%) had not heard about CBE and (93%) had not done mammography before. Generally, more than half (>50%) of the women were not interested in breast screening practices. The reasons they gave included;

1. Lack of know-how in doing BSE
2. No symptoms of breast diseases
3. Belief that they can never get breast diseases
4. Fear of discovery of the presence of breast diseases
5. No time to do breast screening practices since they had to attend to their livelihoods

It is recommended that intensive education on the importance of breast health should be given to women in the rural communities in Ghana.

### **Prevention**

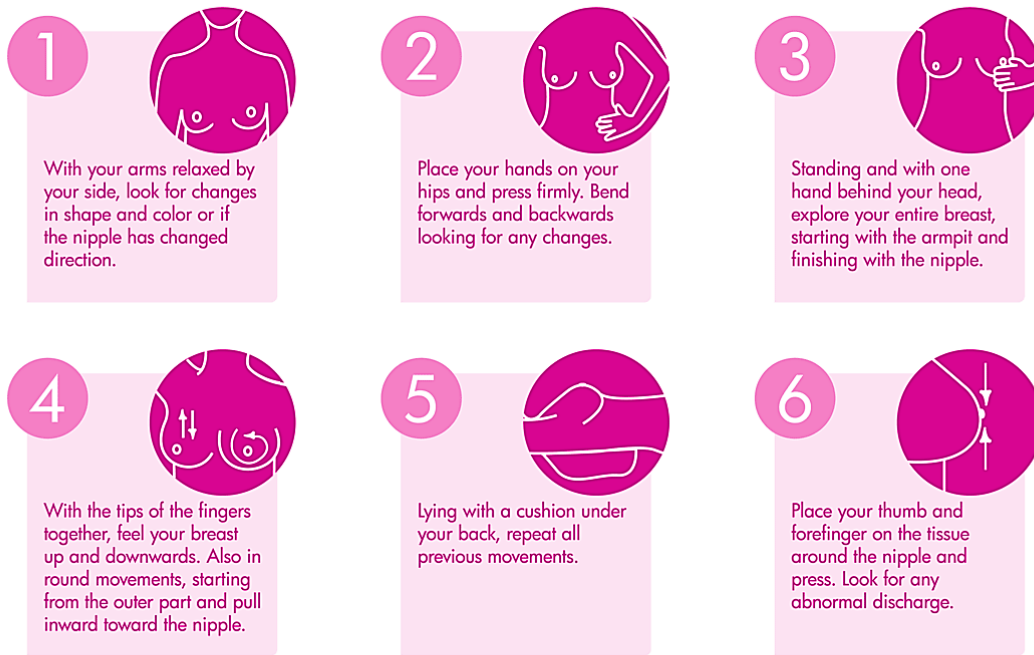
The corner stone to prevention of Breast Cancer is early detection through breast self-examination (BSE) (see Figure 1), clinical breast examination (CBE) and mammography. These practices offer women the best opportunity for reducing breast cancer deaths globally.

We send this clarion call to every woman;

1. Be informed
2. Practice regular breast self-examinations
3. Get screened at any nearby health facility.

To our men;

1. Help save the boobs
2. Become breastie bestie.



**Figure 1: Breast self-examination**

Source: [www.hcmarbella.com](http://www.hcmarbella.com)

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