
MEDIA RELEASE

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“BREASTSCREENING RATES AMONGST SRI LANKAN AND INDIAN WOMEN ON THE RISE THANKS TO COMMUNITY INITIATIVE”: CHIEF CANCER OFFICER

New data has revealed that women from Indian and Sri Lankan communities in NSW are slowly changing their behaviour towards screening mammograms and are taking control of their health to prevent risks of breast cancer.

Chief Cancer Officer and CEO of the Cancer Institute NSW, Professor David Currow highlighted that their research showed that by June 2015, the number of breast screens for women from Indian and Sri Lankan backgrounds had increased by 8% on the previous year, with numbers continuing to rise.

“This shift in behaviour amongst the Indian and Sri Lankan communities is due largely to the incredible work of the Pink Sari Project, a community initiative launched in 2014 by the NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service in partnership with the NSW Refugee Health Service, University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and BreastScreen NSW with funding from the Cancer Institute NSW”.

In the past, research had shown women from Culturally and Linguistically diverse backgrounds (aged 50-74) had low rates of participation in the BreastScreen NSW program. The Pink Sari Project’s aim was to increase mammograms in women aged 50-74 from these backgrounds by at least 5% through the Cancer Institute NSW’s Evidence to Practice Grant.

“I am extremely pleased to say the Pink Sari Project exceeded expectations with statistics indicating that between June 2014 to June 2015, there have been the significant improvements amongst Indian and Sri Lankan women aged 50-69” Professor Currow emphasised.

“The number of first time screeners has increased across all women (Indian and Sri Lankan), and the rate of entry of new Indian and Sri Lankan women into the program has grown. The rate of lapsed screeners returning to the program has also increased”.

Records highlight that within a year there was an 8% increase in number of screens by Indian and Sri Lankan women. The break down shows that there had been a 7% increase in number of screens by Hindi speaking women, a 10% increase in number of screens by Tamil speaking women and an 11% increase in number of screens by Sinhalese speaking women.

Associate Professor Dr Nirmala Pathmanathan, Service Director at Westmead Breast Cancer Institute confirms that since the Pink Sari Project initiative began in 2014, the number of bookings for breast screening at their clinic from Indian and Sri Lankan women have increased significantly.

The Pink Sari Project provided a platform for a variety of organisations, stakeholders and individuals from a range of backgrounds to contribute online and offline support to raise awareness about mammograms and allay women’s fears about breast screening.

“Consultations with the targeted communities revealed that the biggest barriers to breast screening were negativity and a “culture of silence” on breast cancer with women aged 50-74. Some women also explained they were not booking their breast screens because of misconceptions that mammograms may cause serious health problems” said A/Prof Pathmanathan.

“We were overwhelmed by the outstanding support we received from Indian and Sri Lankan breast cancer survivors and their families who volunteered their personal experiences. This provided a better understanding of the important role of breast screening in early detection of breast cancers providing women with less invasive treatment options and better survival outcomes.”

The success of the Pink Sari Project has been due to the collective effort of individuals and communities from all sectors coming together with a common vision, to raise awareness about how breast screening can save lives.

In Australia, 1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime and 1 in 3 women will develop some form of cancer.

All women aged between 50 and 74 should contact 13 20 50 to book your free mammogram.

For more information, visit the Pink Sari Project website www.pinksariproject.org

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