

EDITORIAL

Moving Forward to Optimize Global Breast Health Care: An Ambitious Task

It is indeed a pleasure to present to you this supplement of *The Breast Journal*, which is prepared by the members of the Breast Health Global Initiative (BHGI). This supplement is the product of efforts of many committed individuals who spent endless hours to develop uniform guidelines for international breast health care and cancer treatment. This process has involved reviews of the available reports in the literature, assembly of clinical observations, and the testimony of breast cancer patients. The guidelines were designed with a great deal of sensitivity to the existing diversity in the delivery of breast health care and with a sincere recognition of the current economical and cultural differences in countries of limited resources all over the world.

As you will note, these guidelines are somewhat different from other guidelines that are traditionally developed. The most impressive characteristic of the proposed guidelines in this supplement is the concept of stratification. In other words, the required essentials for the delivery of breast health care are based on the anticipated level of available resources in each economically diverse region.

This approach provides a realistic opportunity for every region of the world to make an effort to gradually improve their delivery of breast health care. This stepwise improvement is indeed a remarkable starting point, which will pave the way for a gradual progression to optimal care. The guidelines are only starting tools for those who are committed to making a change in the current status of breast health care. They are not meant to be interpreted as an established rule for which a different infrastructure and a wider participation of qualified individuals are required. The proposed guideline by the BHGI is an introduction to the necessity for a movement at an international level to highlight the importance of optimal breast health care.

Implementation of these guidelines is an ambitious task and requires a significant amount of endurance to

make sure that this message is heard by heads of governments, health care leaders, administrators, physicians, scientists, health care providers, nurses, social workers, technicians, industry, religious leaders, and more importantly, by the people of the world.

Breast cancer remains a major public health problem across the globe. This is a disease with no known cause or cure and that respects no boundaries. Like a silent enemy, breast cancer presents itself in a variety of forms and shapes and strikes at different times and places. Breast cancer is not only a systemic disease causing major physical impairment, but it is also associated with significant psychosexual problems. Breasts play an important role in a woman's sexuality and self-image. For many women, the loss of a breast as a result of breast cancer parallels the loss of their sexual identity.

During recent years, advances in breast imaging and genetics, the introduction of minimally invasive diagnostic and therapeutic modalities, as well as targeted molecular therapy have produced significant progress in enhancing the quality of life for many breast cancer patients.

There has also been a remarkable change in the fundamental understanding of the disease. Breast cancer is no longer viewed as a single localized disease with radical surgery as the only alternative therapy. Breast cancer is a heterogeneous systematic disease that requires the attention of an integrated team of knowledgeable and interested physicians and health care providers who believe in a consolidated and multidisciplinary approach to breast health care. The magnitude of the importance of breast cancer has inspired establishment of breast health centers focused on fostering individualized therapy.

At the global level, however, there are some countries in the world that have absolutely no ability to enjoy the advancements made in breast cancer detection and therapy. There are also significant numbers of medically underserved individuals in developed countries who have no access to breast health care and experience similar poor outcomes as those living in countries of limited resources. Access to breast health care and optimal approaches to breast cancer detection and therapy are

a global challenge and require a worldwide collaboration among those who have the power to implement the required changes.

We need to do better; whenever a patient comes to us for the first time with an ulcerated breast mass too far advanced for us to help, it is a slap in our faces. As

physicians, health care providers, and educators wherever we are, we need to support others who believe in enhancing the quality of care that our patients deserve.

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