

Early Detection of Breast Cancer is Vital

In Hong Kong, breast cancer is the most common cancer in women. The etiology is likely related to genetic and the environment and its incidence have been doubled in the past 20 years.

According to the data from the Hong Kong Cancer Registry, 1 in every 22 women suffers from breast cancer and there is an increasing prevalence of younger age group. From 1994 to 2004, the increase rate of new cases between women aged 40 to 49 and women aged 50 to 59 had doubled and the peak was at 40s in Chinese women. This is different from Caucasian women which occur after menopause. Familial background and continuous oestrogen exposure, such as early menarche, late menopause, late pregnancy, nulliparity, are its risk factors. In addition, BRCA 1 and BRCA 2 gene mutation have been shown to increase the risk of breast cancer by 10 times. Hence, the identification of these high risk women is essential so early screening can be started.

Treatments for breast cancer include surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy, hormonal therapy such as Tamoxifen and aromatase inhibitors and targeted therapy. Among all, targeted therapy such as Trastuzumab and Lapatinib is the latest advance, which is suitable to target cancers with cerbB2 receptor positive. It can interfere these receptors of breast cancer to suppress its growth.

Early diagnosis and preventative measures are important to achieve a better prognosis, particularly for high risk women. Breast examination should start earlier for those women. Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) can be performed for those who have BRCA mutation. Ultrasonography and mammogram should be performed for women aged 30 or above. In future, the aim of investigation is to achieve chemoprevention, so that high risk women can be beneficial.