

REPORT

Breast Cancer Awareness Seminar
collaboration with
Bahria university

Theme:

No One Faces Breast Cancer Alone

Venue:

Bahria University, Islamabad

Date: 23 October 2024

Human Resource Development Network (HRDN)
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Introduction

Breast cancer is a pressing global health issue, and in Pakistan, it has reached alarming proportions. With one in nine women expected to be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime, the disease not only threatens lives but also imposes an emotional and financial burden on families. Moreover, the lack of awareness, cultural barriers, and limited access to healthcare services exacerbate the severity of this issue, particularly in rural and underprivileged areas. Women are often diagnosed at a late stage, when treatment is less effective, and the chances of survival decrease significantly.

Against this backdrop, the seminar titled "No One Faces Breast Cancer Alone" was organized at Bahria University, Islamabad. The event was aimed at spreading awareness about breast cancer, emphasizing the importance of early detection, and offering emotional and community support to those affected by this disease. This concept paper outlines the rationale, objectives, structure, and outcomes of the seminar, highlighting the collaboration between healthcare professionals, academia, and students.

Rationale

The breast cancer awareness seminar was organized to address the rising incidence of breast cancer in Pakistan and to create an open platform for discussing prevention, early detection, and treatment options. Breast cancer remains one of the leading causes of cancer-related deaths among women globally, and Pakistan bears one of the highest breast cancer burdens in Asia. With one in nine women expected to be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime, the need for education and early detection is critical. Despite advancements in medical treatments, Pakistan faces significant challenges due to late diagnosis and a general lack of public health awareness, especially in rural areas.

As highlighted in previous initiatives, such as the Pink Ribbon Day celebrated in November 2022, a combination of socio-cultural and structural barriers has further complicated the breast cancer crisis. These barriers include feminine sensitivity, the stigmatization of the disease, and a lack of access to health services, particularly in rural regions where formal health infrastructure is minimal. Illiteracy, poor hygiene conditions, and limited socio-economic resources further exacerbate these challenges. More than half of Pakistan's population is female, yet most women do not have adequate access to medical care due to gender-based discrimination

The theme of the seminar, "No One Faces Breast Cancer Alone," reflects the importance of community support, medical resources, and emotional care in the fight against breast cancer. The seminar also aimed to shed light on the psychosocial challenges faced by breast cancer patients, particularly those from marginalized and rural communities. Women in Pakistan often seek medical attention only at advanced stages of cancer due to a lack of awareness, fear of surgery, belief in traditional or spiritual treatments, and low financial resources. This situation limits treatment options and reduces the effectiveness of interventions, leading to increased mortality rates.

Furthermore, the seminar underscored the role of academic institutions like Bahria University in raising awareness and fostering a supportive environment for both survivors and caregivers. By engaging students, healthcare professionals, and community members, the seminar promoted a message of inclusivity and shared responsibility in tackling the breast cancer crisis.

Objectives

The primary objectives of the breast cancer awareness seminar were:

1. **Raising Awareness:** Educate participants on breast cancer, its causes, risk factors, symptoms, and the importance of early detection.
2. **Promoting Early Detection:** Emphasize the need for regular breast self-examinations, mammograms, and medical check-ups for early diagnosis and better treatment outcomes.
3. **Providing Emotional Support:** Encourage a supportive and inclusive environment for individuals affected by breast cancer, ensuring they do not feel isolated in their battle.
4. **Breaking Stigmas:** Address the cultural and societal stigmas associated with breast cancer, particularly in the Pakistani context, where many women face barriers to seeking medical treatment.
5. **Encouraging Community Participation:** Promote the involvement of academic institutions, healthcare providers, students, and the community in supporting breast cancer awareness campaigns.
6. **Highlighting Treatment Options:** Provide information on the various treatment options available for breast cancer patients, including surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and hormone therapy.
7. **Inspiring Advocacy and Action:** Motivate participants to become advocates for breast cancer awareness and take action within their own communities to spread knowledge and support breast cancer patients.

Key Resource Persons

The seminar featured an esteemed panel from Bahria University and the healthcare community, each contributing essential insights and information:

- Dr. Nasira Malik: A prominent healthcare expert and advocate for breast cancer awareness, Dr. Nasira Malik delivered a powerful talk on breast cancer prevention and the necessity of early diagnosis, drawing from her extensive experience in public health and women's health.
- Dr. Sidra Shahid: Professor at Bahria University, Dr. Shahid represented the university's commitment to healthcare education, underscoring the role of academic institutions in raising awareness about critical health issues.
- Dr. Sohima Anzak: Assistant Professor at Bahria University and event organizer, Dr. Anzak's dedication was key to bringing together stakeholders to promote the seminar's objectives.

Representing HRDN, Ms. Maryam Khan welcomed the audience and introduced Dr. Nasira Malik to take the stage, highlighting HRDN's commitment to community empowerment and support for breast cancer awareness.

Interactive Q&A Session

One of the highlights of the seminar was the interactive Q&A session, where participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and engage with the speakers. Attendees, which included students, faculty members, and healthcare professionals, asked a wide range of questions on topics such as the signs and symptoms of breast cancer, the effectiveness of different treatments, and the psychological challenges faced by breast cancer patients.

Dr. Nasira Malik and Dr. Sidra Shahid responded to these queries with expert insights, providing valuable information on how to reduce risk factors and the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. They also discussed the need for removing the stigma associated with breast cancer and fostering open conversations about women's health issues.

Seminar Outcomes

After the seminar, Bahria University organized a symbolic “Walk for Support” on campus grounds. Students, faculty, and staff joined in the walk, wearing pink ribbons to express solidarity with breast cancer patients and survivors. This walk was a powerful reminder of the unity and strength communities can provide to those impacted by breast cancer. It also served as a visual embodiment of the seminar’s theme, “No One Faces Breast Cancer Alone,” reinforcing the message that women fighting breast cancer are not alone, as they have the support of family, friends, and their communities.

The seminar effectively achieved its goals, leaving a significant impact on attendees and the broader university community. One of the key outcomes was an increase in awareness. Participants gained essential knowledge about breast cancer, including its symptoms, risk factors, and the importance of early detection. Many attendees reported a deeper understanding of the disease and recognized the need for regular screenings and self-examinations to catch it early.

A strong sense of emotional and community support was also fostered during the seminar. By focusing on the theme “No One Faces Breast Cancer Alone,” the event created a welcoming and supportive environment for all participants. Attendees left feeling empowered and ready to support breast cancer patients and advocate for women’s health in their own communities, understanding the importance of standing by those affected.

The seminar further addressed cultural and societal stigmas surrounding breast cancer, encouraging open discussions about women’s health. It underscored the importance of seeking medical help without fear of judgment, breaking down barriers that often prevent women from seeking early care. By tackling these stigmas, the seminar encouraged a more open dialogue about breast cancer and the need for supportive healthcare environments.

Increased student involvement was another positive outcome. The enthusiastic participation of students and faculty members in the Walk for Support reflected a growing commitment to public health advocacy within Bahria University. Many students expressed interest in organizing similar awareness campaigns and becoming more actively involved in health-related initiatives, marking a positive shift towards greater engagement in community health.

Finally, the seminar fostered collaboration between academia and healthcare professionals, providing a valuable platform for sharing knowledge and best practices in breast cancer prevention and treatment. This partnership highlighted the importance of continued collaboration in addressing public health challenges, encouraging a united approach to improving health outcomes for those affected by breast cancer.

Conclusion

The breast cancer awareness seminar at Bahria University was a significant success, promoting education, awareness, and support for a disease that affects millions of women worldwide. The event emphasized that breast cancer is not just a medical issue but a societal challenge that requires collective action from healthcare professionals, academic institutions, and the community. By working together, we can ensure that no one faces breast cancer alone, and that women in Pakistan have the knowledge, resources, and support they need to fight this disease.

This seminar is just the beginning of a larger movement to promote breast cancer awareness and to foster a culture of care, compassion, and community support. The organizers and participants of this seminar are committed to continuing their efforts to raise awareness, break stigmas, and advocate for women's health, ensuring a brighter and healthier future for all.







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