



ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

MEDIA RELEASE

Screening programme for breast cancer

Tuesday 4, May, 2010

While it has long been known that a significant proportion of breast cancer cases have a hereditary basis, until recently there has been no dedicated clinic in Australia offering younger women at high risk of familial cancer a comprehensive screening programme to help detect cancers at the earliest possible stage.

Associate Professor Ian Bennett from the University of Queensland has told delegates to the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons' Annual Scientific Congress (ASC) that a clinic at the Chermiside BreastScreen service has been so successful that such a system of dedicated screening for high risk women should be established throughout Australia.

The Familial Breast Cancer Screening Clinic (FBCSC) was established at the North Brisbane BreastScreen Queensland Service in 1999 to offer younger women at risk of familial breast cancer a multimodality screening programme including mammography, breast ultrasound and clinical breast examination.

Associate Professor Bennett said the wider range of screening methods was needed because breast tissue is denser in younger women – making cancer harder to detect – yet familial cancers were often the most aggressive, making early detection crucial.

“The results of the screening programme at the FBCSC have been very encouraging and better than expected, given the difficulties of detecting cancer in such young women,” he said.

“The detected cancers in this review of the clinic were very small tumours with infrequent nodal involvement consistent with early detection, which means that the outcomes for these women should be extremely good.

“We are now able to say, after analysing the results of more than 7,051 breast screening examinations on a total of 2,440 at-risk women, that we believe this type of model should be rolled out across Australia.

“What we need in Australia is a uniform dedicated screening protocol which incorporates the elements of this programme but which additionally includes MRI.

“I believe such a programme would be best delivered by BreastScreen Australia, which already has the necessary infrastructure,” Professor Bennett said.

“A recent review of BreastScreen Australia advocated exclusion of such high risk women from the programme but this could potentially result in an uncoordinated and fragmented approach to the screening of these women. They need a dedicated programme as offered by the FBCSC at North Brisbane BreastScreen.

“We believe that the most efficient and cost effective way of providing screening for high risk women is to provide this as a specialized service within selected BreastScreen Australia clinics utilising the equipment and expertise co-located within these existing services.”

Nearly 2000 delegates are attending the ASC, which runs from 4 to 7 May and is being held at the Perth Convention Exhibition Centre. The ASC program is available online at www.surgeons.org

Media inquiries: Michael Barrett, Manager Media & PR Manager - 0429 028 933
Ruth Charters, Senior Media & PR Officer - 0409 330 274