

Canadian Breast Cancer Initiative

National Committee for the Canadian Breast Cancer Screening Initiative

Summer 1995

History

The National Workshop on the Early Detection of Breast Cancer held in Ottawa in 1988 recommended that “*Canadian women aged 50-69 be offered and encouraged to participate in an early detection program consisting of mammography, physical examination of the breast by a health professional and the teaching and monitoring of breast self-examination every two years. This should be done through dedicated screening centres.*” At that time, the federal/provincial/territorial Conference of Deputy Ministers of Health agreed to “*encourage ongoing dialogue among provinces, the federal government, the Canadian Cancer Society (CCS), and the National Cancer Institute of Canada (NCIC) to facilitate the introduction and operation of breast cancer screening programs*” and mandated Health Canada (Disease Prevention Division, Systems for Health Directorate) to facilitate and coordinate these activities.

As a first step, Health Canada in collaboration with the CCS and the NCIC, organized Interchange ‘90, A Canadian Forum to Collaborate on Breast Cancer Screening Program Development. The Forum recommended that “*a group composed of representatives from Health Canada, Statistics Canada, CCS and interested provincial jurisdictions be established to promote and facilitate collaborative planning and work in the development of ongoing breast cancer screening programs in Canada*”. Issues to be addressed included the development of a national database and the establishment of quality assurance programs. In response to this recommendation, Health Canada invited provinces/territories to delegate representatives to form a national group on breast cancer screening. Since November, 1990, the Department has supported semi-annual meetings of this group.

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In December 1992, in response to the Fourth Report of the Standing Committee on Health and Welfare, Social Affairs, Seniors and the Status of Women entitled “Breast Cancer: Unanswered Questions”, the federal government launched the Canadian Breast Cancer Initiative with funding of \$25 million over five years and the following components:

- the Canadian Breast Cancer Research Initiative (CBCRI)
- the Steering Committee on Breast Cancer Care and Treatment Guidelines
- the Coordinating Committee on Professional Education
- the Breast Cancer Information Exchange Pilot Projects
- the National Forum on Breast Cancer
- the Breast Cancer Screening Initiative

Under the component Breast Cancer Screening Initiative the federal government recommitted “*to enable a federal/provincial/territorial working group on breast cancer screening to implement and evaluate breast cancer screening programs in Canada*”. Furthermore, Health Canada was given the mandate to “*support the initiatives of jurisdictions that have established organized screening programs to standardize their data and promote quality assurance of breast cancer screening programs*”.

Immediately following the National Forum on Breast Cancer (Montreal, November, 1993), the Department worked with the members of the National Committee on Breast Cancer Screening to determine how best to respond to the recommendations of the National Forum. For that purpose, the membership of the group was expanded to create a broader initiative for breast cancer screening in Canada, now known as the “Canadian Breast Cancer Screening Initiative”.

National Committee

The National Committee for the Canadian Breast Cancer Screening Initiative is responsible for the federal/provincial/territorial and interprovincial review, discussion and actions on matters of mutual interest or concern that are related to the early detection and screening of breast cancer including the development of appropriate recommendations when required. More specifically, the National Committee is working to:

- foster the development of organized quality screening programs in Canada and the development and the use of a national database across the country;
- facilitate the exchange of information between the members;
- identify specific issues relating to breast cancer screening which would benefit from collaborative national action;
- determine the process for addressing the mandate and the above issues, which may include the formation of appropriate working groups; and
- review and approve the recommendations of the working groups.

In May, 1995, Health Canada appointed Dr. Heather Bryant, from the Alberta Cancer Board, as chair of the National Committee. She is assisted in this function by an Executive Committee. A membership list is enclosed.

Activities

The National Committee is focussing its activities on the following two areas: public education, health promotion and program-focused awareness issues; and program development, evaluation and information sharing issues. Each subject area is headed by a Coordinator.

A major undertaking of the subject area dealing with Program Development, Evaluation and Information Sharing is the development of a Canadian Breast Cancer Screening Database. The database is operated and managed by the Bureau of Chronic Disease Epidemiology, of Health Canada’s Laboratory Centre for Disease Control (LCDC), under the guidance of a **Database Management Sub-committee**. The mandate of the Sub-committee is to advise on the content, management process, and utilization of the database; decide on variables suitable for inclusion in the database; clarify definitions of variables in the coding manuals to ensure uniform interpretation across provinces; provide liaison to each province, in order to facilitate appropriate formulating of data; provide a framework for routine or special reports to be prepared from the database; decide on the appropriateness of requests and manage the utilization of data from the database. In addition, a **Technical Sub-committee**, develops and operationalizes the strategies for uniform sharing of data in the Canadian Breast Cancer Screening Database. The Database Management Sub-committee has identified its first project: it will compare the different ways the Ontario and Nova Scotia programs approach Clinical Breast Examination (CBE) and the outcomes in terms of abnormality rates, cancer detection rates, and so on.

The **Working Group on the Quality Determinants of an Organized Screening Program**, also under the subject area of Program Development, Evaluation and Information Sharing, will help in the development of quality screening programs by identifying the quality determinants of an organized screening program and translating those into written recommendations or statements, for approval by the National Committee. Their work will be based on a review of the evidence (published literature) and, when necessary, on the opinion of screening programs experts. The first two areas to be addressed are patient up-take and satisfaction. Based on the products developed by this working group, the **Working**

Group on Disseminating/Communicating the Advantages of an Organized Screening Program will develop a message that will explain the benefits of organized screening programs to women, health care professionals and policy makers; raise awareness among health care professionals on the benefits of organized screening programs; seek support from the various professional groups who have a degree of influence on the promotion of the use of organized screening programs; and review provincial breast cancer screening initiatives to ensure their appropriateness. The working group will also develop a plan of action with mechanisms for distribution of the message as well as an evaluation plan.

A **National Workshop** will be organized (1997) to bring together radiologists, pathologists, surgeons, policy makers, etc. and build new partnerships with them. The workshop will highlight the accomplishments of the screening programs, present data from the Canadian database, identify areas for further collaboration and raise the profile of the organized programs.

As part of its mandate, the Canadian Breast Cancer Screening Initiative will also be addressing other non-programmatic screening/early detection issues. The first issue identified as a priority for action is **breast self-examination**. This issue was selected in an attempt to respond to the recommendation of the National Forum on Breast Cancer “*to hold a consensus meeting of all professional and volunteer agencies involved in the teaching of breast self-examination (BSE) and consumer groups, to identify a uniform message for delivery throughout Canada*”. A working group was set up and a questionnaire developed and sent out to organizations/associations across the country that teach BSE, in order to determine how it is being taught across Canada, what material is used, what methods are being taught, and by whom. The results of this study, combined with those of the review of the literature being carried out by the Canadian Periodic Health Examination Task Force, will serve as a basis for determining the needs in this area and the format of a workshop.

For further information, contact:

Ms. Lise Mathieu

Disease Prevention Division, Systems for Health Directorate
Health Canada
Jeanne Mance Building
Tunney's Pasture
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 1B4

Tel: (613) 954-8668

Fax: (613) 941-2633

E-mail: lmathieu@hpb.hwc.ca

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*Chair: Dr. Heather Bryant
(Alberta Program for the Early Detection of Breast Cancer)*

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- **Government of the N.W.T.**
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