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Access to health: breast cancer awareness and screening camps in rural India

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Breast cancer is the most common cancer of urban Indian women and the second most common in rural women. Owing to lack of awareness of the disease in India and in absence of breast cancer screening programs, majority of breast cancers are diagnosed at a relatively advanced stage. Government agencies, NGOs and charity organizations have put great emphasis on improved breast cancer awareness among masses for promotion of early detection, providing comprehensive treatment module, providing support for breast cancer management and for screening and rehabilitation. The efforts have resulted in an improved survival and quality of life of Indian breast cancer patients but the improvement is more pronounced in urban population. In rural areas, there is still a lack of good health care and awareness among masses regarding the importance of early breast cancer screening and thus cases of late diagnosis are more prevalent. In addition, there is still an identified lack of breast cancer screening programs in rural areas which further causes late diagnosis. The other common factors that lead to late diagnosis include delays on the part of womenfolk of rural areas to seek advice for a recognized health problem which is mainly due to financial reasons, social/cultural reasons such as general inhibition of women to see the doctor for breast ailments, general scare of people towards cancer like disorders and a general indifference of women towards their health. In rural areas Illiteracy is widespread and people are inhibited and not motivated to come to the hospitals for screening/checkup. Considering various factors of cancer incidence rate, to address the most common barriers such as lower cancer literacy, lesser availability and accessibility of proper medical facilities, three Indian states were shortlisted to initiate the project ECHO by organizing breast cancer awareness and screening programs for rural and semi-urban Indian population. In addition to being a CSR approach, Project ECHO also increased the cancer literacy amongst the rural population and emphasized on health education, early diagnosis of breast cancers and more public facilities for breast cancer treatments.

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