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Review

What do women know about breast cancer prophylaxis and a healthy style of life?



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ABSTRACT

Aim: The aim of the study was to determine the factors influencing women's knowledge concerning breast cancer prophylaxis and find out the sources of the knowledge.

Background: In the Greater Poland region, breast cancer has been the most frequently detected tumour for years. The percentage of breast cancer cases has increased by 31% in the last decade.

Materials and methods: The study encompassed 337 women aged 40–59 who participated in the mammographic examinations. An original research tool was used which assessed the level of knowledge concerning breast cancer prophylaxis, the knowledge of health-oriented behaviour in this regard and the influence of the medical personnel on women's education. **Results:** Age is a factor diversifying the knowledge of the breast self-examination method. Doctors and nurses were rarely indicated as a source of knowledge concerning breast cancer prophylaxis. The subjects presented a high level of knowledge of the factors increasing the risk of developing cancer.

Conclusions: A correlation between the level of education and the knowledge of one's own breast to a degree which enables a woman to detect even a slight change was observed. Vital findings also concern the sources of knowledge concerning breast cancer prophylaxis. The results of the studies indicated little informative support on the part of the medical personnel; therefore, one should call for supplementing training courses for doctors and nurses focusing on the issues of prophylaxis, including the method of breast self-examination.

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1. Background and aim

Breast cancer is the most frequent malignant tumour occurring in women in Poland. It constitutes almost 22% of the

cases of all the malignant tumours and is the main – among tumours – cause of women's deaths. Thirteen percent of oncological patients die because of breast cancer. According to the data of the National Cancer Register, in 2010, 15,784 new cases of breast cancer were observed in Poland.¹ Taking into

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consideration the ageing of the population, an increase of tumour cases is predicted.² Every day 14 Polish women die of breast cancer. Every year the number of deaths exceeds 5000.³

The commonly used method of diagnosing the disease at an early stage of development is the mammographic examination, performed in women who do not show clinical symptoms. It has been proven that long-term studies of a population character may lead to a decrease of death rate due to breast cancer by as much as 25%.⁴

Despite information campaigns (national and local), a low participation of women in the breast cancer screening programmes has constituted a serious problem for years. According to the data of the Main Coordination Centre for the Population-Based Programme for Early Detection of Breast Cancer, only 35% of the entitled women take part in the examinations.⁵

Therefore, it is necessary to take further action focusing not only on informing women about the possibility of taking part in the examinations but also improving women's knowledge of breast cancer prophylaxis and, in a further perspective, changing women's way of thinking of the issue.

It was the diagnosis of the level to which the women in the Greater Poland region are familiar with breast cancer prophylaxis and determining vital deficits in this area that became the point of departure for undertaking this study. While designing the study and establishing the criteria for inclusion of women in the study group, the researchers decided that women between 40 and 59 years of age would become the participants of the study since the largest number of breast tumour cases occurs in women in this particular age group. The women in the 40-59 age bracket constitute over 47% of all tumour cases.

The aim of the paper was to select the factors which determine women's knowledge concerning breast cancer prophylaxis and indicate the sources of this knowledge.

2. Materials and methods

While searching for participants, the purposive sampling was used, taking into account the following criteria:

- (1) age:
 - (a) between 40 and 49 years of age (turning forty conditions using mammography),
 - (b) between 50 and 59 years of age (women in this age group are entitled to free mammography that does not require prescription as part of the National Breast Cancer Prevention Programme).
- (2) The lack of a diagnosis of a malignant breast tumour.
- (3) The willingness to take part in the preventive examinations for early detection of breast cancer.
- (4) A written consent to the participation in the study.

The study was conducted in the period from July to December 2010 in a group of 337 healthy women who decided to take part in the mammographic examinations in the Centre of Cancer Prevention and Epidemiology (24/26 Kazimierza Wielkiego Street, Poznan). In order to eliminate potential imperfections of the research tool, the researchers found it

necessary to carry out a pilot study in advance in which 100 women took part.

The original research tool consisted of 32 questions concerning three areas:

1. The assessment of the level of knowledge in the area of breast cancer prophylaxis.
2. The knowledge of health-oriented behaviour and using it in practice.
3. The scope of education provided by doctors and nurses as far as breast cancer prophylaxis is concerned.

While preparing the questions concerning the knowledge of breast cancer prophylaxis, the recommendations addressed to women in the brochures prepared by the National Health Service and the Ministry of Health were taken into consideration. The information about breast tumour available in women's magazines was also taken into account. Moreover, it was deemed appropriate to include questions about the sources of knowledge concerning breast cancer prophylaxis and personal experience in obtaining the knowledge in direct contacts with the medical personnel.

The minimum level of significance $p < 0.05$ was assumed for the analyses. The calculations were conducted with the use of the SPSS version 12 statistical package. The detailed research aims are presented in Table 1.

The study included the following variables:

1. dependent ones: the level of knowledge concerning breast cancer prophylaxis, the knowledge of the breast self-examination method, reported knowledge of one's own breast which enables to detect even a slight change,
2. independent ones: age, education, the financial situation.

Taking into account the division into two age groups, women at the age between 50 and 59 may be said to constitute 70% of the subjects. Such a significant majority of women in the older age group should be explained by the tasks carried out by the Centre of Cancer Prevention and Epidemiology in which the studies were conducted. The Centre specialises in performing mammographic examinations as part of the National Breast Cancer Prevention Programme which is addressed to women between 50 and 59 years of age. There were 55.7% of women with secondary education, 24% with higher education, 15% with vocational secondary education and 6% with primary education. 20% of the women defined their financial situation as a good, 10% as a poor and 70% as an average.^a At the same time, it is worth adding that such factors as: the place of residence (city/village), being a member of a specific socio-occupational group (e.g. a manager, a private entrepreneur, a service administration employee, a housewife, a pensioner), being a member of a religious group or the number of children did not have a significant influence on the results of the study.

^a As far as the education of the women in the younger age group (40-49 years of age) is concerned, it was as follows: primary education (2.4%); vocational education (13.4%); secondary education (58.5%); higher education (25.6%).

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