

Provincial Breast Health Strategy

Working together to improve breast cancer prevention, screening & diagnosis in BC

Provincial Breast Health Strategy Update

February 4, 2011

With the work of the Provincial Breast Health Strategy (PBHS) now well underway, we want to make 2011 the year that BC makes significant progress in improving breast cancer screening, diagnosis and prevention for women across the province. At the Provincial Breast Health Summit last October, the PBHS project teams received early insight and valuable feedback from more than 120 of BC's breast health leaders, clinicians and breast cancer survivors.

Although our province has the best breast cancer outcomes in the country, there is still room for improvement in the system in order to reduce the number of women dying from breast cancer. To achieve this goal, it will take the participation and cooperation of everyone involved in providing breast health services across BC, from health authorities and the provincial government to physicians, community agencies, academic institutions and others.

The Breast Health Action Plan (Feb 2010) identified the areas of the current system that require improvements and recommended action plans to address them. The PBHS project teams are focused on implementing these action plans. This is a summary of their activities so far:

Clinical Pathway

With members representing the clinical disciplines (including radiology, oncology and pathology), the health authorities and the Ministry of Health Services, the Clinical Pathway Team has been mapping out a pathway designed to improve a woman's journey through the system from when she receives an abnormal mammogram result, or an abnormal finding on physical breast examination, to the point where treatment is initiated if needed. A draft clinical pathway - designed to standardize and simplify the referral process and the delivery of diagnostic care - is expected in early April after further stakeholder consultation. This pathway is being designed to work within the context of the BC health care system, building on innovative models that already exist in health authorities.

Digital Mammography

This team is working on a provincial strategy to implement digital mammography equipment and information technology throughout the screening and diagnostic system in BC. The team has created an inventory of equipment (including pending purchases) and developed the technical specifications for new digital equipment. The members are now examining the information technology and system changes needed to support digital imaging across the province and exploring potential funding models. A provincial strategy for digital mammography is a complex undertaking. Consultation with the health authorities, government and other stakeholders will be needed over the coming months before it can be fully developed by early summer.

Prevention

To date, the Prevention Team has primarily been focused on a review of BC's existing breast cancer screening policy. In the fall of 2010, the BC Cancer Agency (BCCA) commissioned a review of the evidence to inform the policy review. The results of this review were considered by the Screening Policy Sub-committee of the Prevention Team and feedback was provided to the BCCA for consideration when recommending updates to the current breast cancer screening policy. Discussions are currently underway and a revised policy is expected to be developed by March 31, 2011.

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This team will also be collaborating on the most effective (evidence-based) approach to the primary prevention of breast cancer and integrating the delivery of primary prevention with existing healthy living programs province-wide. Government, the health authorities, physicians, the PBHS partners and other agencies are currently providing women and health care professionals with information about breast cancer prevention. One of the objectives of the PBHS is to align these efforts so that women ultimately receive clear and consistent messages about primary and secondary prevention.

Workforce

The goal of this team is to increase the number of highly qualified professionals in breast cancer screening and diagnostic services through training, recruitment and retention strategies. It is closely tied to the other work underway within the PBHS. The Workforce Team has been looking at the roles and responsibilities of various breast health professionals, recruitment, training, fees, etc. to ensure that the right number and type of professionals are available to meet future needs in the breast health system.

Look for further updates as the PBHS moves forward. If you require more information, please contact Project Director Lynn Pelletier at lpelletier3@phsa.ca

Background

The Provincial Breast Health Strategy is about improving breast cancer prevention, screening and diagnosis so that fewer BC women die from breast cancer.

The PBHS participants are the Ministry of Health Services, the six health authorities, physicians and key community partners, including the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, the Canadian Cancer Society and the BC Radiological Society.

The PBHS project teams are currently working on four key areas: clinical pathway, digital mammography, workforce and prevention. BC's 2010 Breast Health Action Plan, which was developed by the Provincial Health Services Authority at the request of the Ministry of Health Services, identified these as the primary areas in need of attention to improve breast health in our province. For more information about the PBHS or the BHAP, please click here <http://www.phsa.ca/HealthProfessionals/pbhs/default.htm> or visit www.phsa.ca and look for the PBHS under the health professional section.

Contact Information

The PBHS is co-chaired by Dr. Jan Christilaw, President of BC Women's and Dr. David Levy, President of the BC Cancer Agency. The Project Director is Lynn Pelletier.

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