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Breast and cervix cancer: Sabah women too shy



Dr Juliana

Jo Ann Mool

KOTA KINABALU: Sabah women are too shy to discuss breast and cervix-related problems with their doctors until it is already too late, according to a family physician.

Dr Juliana Samuel said organising talks on breast and cervical cancer frequently to create awareness among small groups is the best way as it will be interactive.

"I am trying to create that awareness because I found that Sabah people are more shy, so they dare not come and ask you straight whether they have a problem...until they start bleeding, for instance.

"Patients will tell us their problems and concern over the disease and we can answer on the spot. Rather than when they come for treatment such as for cough, cold and flu, they are not going to open up and tell us their problems or concerns," said Dr Samuel, a private practitioner.

The women wellness talk on breast and cervical cancer awareness by her was held for the first time by the Permai Polyclinic for its patients and public, Saturday.

She opined that the problem was that the people here are too much dependent on traditional medicine and that the belief on modern medicine is much less.

"So, now we have to create that awareness as prevention is better than cure," she said.

Dr Samuel also said leaving the organising of such awareness campaigns to the Government alone is not fair.

"Not everyone goes to the Government. There are people who are working who they (Government) cannot target because the working people will have no time to go for the campaigns sponsored by the Government as usually they are at work," she said.

According to Dr Samuel, cervical and breast cancer, especially cervical cancer, is getting more prevalent in Asian countries.

"Now our population is becoming more sexually active...they want to experiment, they are becoming more international, sort of, they are beginning to have sex at a younger age, more sexual partners and without realising that it is not only HIV that they will get when they engage in casual sex.

"So, we must be aware that Human Papillomavirus (HPV) will lead to cervical cancer and that is why screening is important. If you do not screen, you are only going to detect it when the cervical cancer has already spread," she said.

Earlier, in her talk on cervical cancer, Dr Samuel said among others 99.7 per cent of cervical cancer is caused by HPV.

HPV is transmitted through sexual contact as well as non-sexual routes such as through undergarments, surgical and biopsy forceps and infection is easily transmitted very common—up to 80 per cent of women will acquire an HPV infection in their lifetime.

Dr Samuel briefed that every sexually active woman is at risk of acquiring oncogenic (high risk) HPV infection, which may cause cervical cancer and that other co-factors that are associated with the development of cervical cancer following oncogenic HPV infection, among others, are environment, e.g. smoking, sexual exposure at an early age and hormonal factors such as through long-term use of oral contraceptives.

The best prevention of cervical cancer would be through Pap smear examination and vaccination, she said.