

SAVING LIVES THRU' EARLY DETECTION

Organized jointly by

Breast Cancer Welfare Association and Avon Malaysia

A unique Corporate-NGO partnership of Reaching the Unreachable

Saving Lives Thru' Early Detection

Suffering can be minimized through sensible practices in life. Minimal changes in lifestyle habits can save one's life. A group of 36 or so women aged 35-65 years from five kampungs in Rawang, Selangor, acquired an important skill to save their own lives and the lives of other women in their surrounding communities. A low budget "Saving Lives Thru' Early Detection" workshop was held at Kg Kenanga Rawang, Selangor, on Saturday, 3rd March 2007 by the breast cancer survivors and volunteers of Breast Cancer Welfare Association (BCWA) at Pusat Pemulihan Dalam Komuniti, Kg Kenanga Rawang.

The contents of the workshop included a great deal of discussions and practical breast self-examination (BSE) sessions. The women received training in the theoretical aspects of breast cancer and breast self examination. However, the main part of the workshop was an in-depth discussion and the hands-on practical session where the women lay down on mats to learn the art of breast self examination. As a result of the training, each of these 36 women has pledged to train at least 10 other women to practice breast self examination, thereby creating a multiplier effect.

The women realized that they need to be more vigilant about their breast health and to seek medical help for any unusual changes that they experience. Taking control of one's breast health can enable early detection, hence, help to save lives, save the breast, save cost and reduce suffering. The main strategy of this project entitled *Saving Lives Thru' Early Detection* is to reach out to women in rural areas and to train them to be breast aware and to practice early detection and look out for any unusual changes in their breasts.

The workshop session spurred intensive discussions on socio-cultural factors and social stigma related to cancer and breast cancer being the main cause of women delaying or not seeking medical treatment. The word "cancer" to these women meant "death around the corner" and "being abandoned by the husband". When asked what was the main deterrent creating the hesitation in doing breast self-examination and in getting annual medical examination, the answer was "Takut, nanti dapat tahu ada kanser payu dara, dan tak boleh mengatasi hakikat dan kesannya" (afraid, may come to know that I have breast cancer, and won't be able to cope with the reality and its consequences). The breast cancer survivors of BCWA were role models for the day. Not only were they able to convince the workshop participants that there is life after breast cancer, but they were also there to inform that they were not rejected by their spouses and society. These role models were women who had been vigilant about their breast health and they sought medical treatment at an early stage. Most of all, for these women, social stigma of getting cancer was not an issue. Saving their lives through early detection and medical treatment mattered most as they wanted to be around for their families.

At the workshop the women learned through practice to recognize normal and abnormal changes in their breasts, at the same time, they were advised to seek appropriate medical help for any abnormal changes they experienced.

BCWA is planning to conduct many such similar low-budget community-based workshops to reach out to unreachable women in rural areas to empower them to take control of their lives by practicing early detection of breast cancer. These community-based workshops entail working in partnership with the local community leaders to identify a good mix of local women of varying age groups, obtaining a local community building and planning the logistics to implement them.

This would not be possible if not for the joint effort between Avon Malaysia and BCWA, a unique community service partnership project entitled “*Saving Lives Thru’ Early Detection*”. This project was conceptualized in October 2006, when the President of BCWA, Ms Ranjit Kaur traveled to New York to participate jointly with Avon Malaysia management staff Puan Nik Surina Suria and Puan Saharah Noon in a one-week Avon Global Fundraising Training program conducted by the American Cancer Society, and at the same time, participated in the Global Connection Ribbon Tour and the Avon Walk Around the World for Breast Cancer organized by Avon Foundation.

BCWA and Avon Malaysia are joining forces to raise funds that will be used for conducting many such similar *Saving Lives Thru’ Early Detection* workshops throughout the country, particularly in the rural communities.

A Charity Hi-tea will be held on Thursday, 28 June 2007 at Hotel Shangri-La Kuala Lumpur. Puan Sri Datin Seri Dato’ Akmal Abdul Salam, the Patron of BCWA who is also the Patron of the Charity Hi-tea event urged individuals, corporate companies and well wishers to contribute generously to this project. Tables are being sold at RM5,000, RM4,000, RM3,000 and RM1,500. The event will be accompanied by a whole array of surprise entertainment and fun-filled activities. Contributions can be made to BREAST CANCER WELFARE ASSOCIATION. For more information call 03 7954 0133 on Monday-Friday during office hours.