BREAST SELF-EXAMINATION AS A METHOD FOR EARLY DETECTION OF BREAST CANCER BASED ON LITERATURE REVIEW

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Summary: Breast cancer is the most common malignancy among women. It is at present the most common cancer standing behind approx. 17.4% of all morbidity and approx. 22.2% of all deaths. Every year in Poland nearly 11,000 new cases of breast cancer are recorded and this number is constantly growing. The main reason for this state of affairs is seen in a small number of screening. It is therefore important to spread knowledge about breast cancer prevention, conducting training in currently available knowledge regarding risk factors as well as the promotion of healthy behaviours of women in the early detection of breast cancer. The simplest examination used to detect cancerous changes is breast self-examination. It helps to detect adverse effects in the breast and increases the chances of their recovery. In accordance with the recommendations of the Polish Gynecological Society regarding the prevention and early diagnosis of changes in the mammary gland, it is recommended that women over the age of 20 should regularly once a month carry out breast self-examination. Women menstruating should perform a test on the second or third day after menstruation, and pregnant women and post-menopausal women should conduct this always on the same day of the month. Breast self-examination should consist of a visual inspection and palpation. The aim of this study is to present the methodology of breast self-examination to detect cancer lesions at an early stage of their development and provide an overview of the results of Polish research on the knowledge of breast self-examination techniques, awareness of women surveyed regarding the age at which breast self-examination should be started, the frequency with which breast examination must be carried out, knowledge of risk factors for breast cancer or symptoms of breast cancer.

Keywords: malignancy, risk factors, breast examination

Introduction

Breast cancer in the nineties was the second most common cancer among Polish women. It is now the most common cancer, responsible for approx. 17.4% of all morbidity and approx. 22.2% of all deaths. Every year in Poland nearly 11,000 new cases of breast cancer are recorded and this number is constantly growing (Zych et al. 2006).

In order to improve the effectiveness of treatment, screening tests that allow to diagnose the disease early in its development were introduced in oncology. In Poland since 2006 women aged 50-69 have been subject to screening mammography and this test is performed at two-year intervals, which is in line with the recommendations of the committee of experts of the EU (Didkowska 2011). Prerequisite for effective screening is mass, long-term nature and high quality of these tests (Humphrey et al. 2002). In countries that have introduced prevention programs, a decrease in mortality by approx. 15% is visible (Nelson et al. 2009). In Poland, reportability among women surveyed is low and in 2011 it amounted to 43.5% (Jokiel 2009).

It is therefore necessary to spread knowledge about the prevention of breast cancer among women, training them on methods targeted at eliminating or reducing risk factors for breast cancer, as well as promoting healthy behaviors, including breast self-examination by women of all ages (Kaczmarek-Borowska et al. 2013, Tood, Stuifbergen 2012).

This study is illustrative nature and it has been written based on a query of Polish and foreign literature. The aim of this study is to present the methodology of breast self-examination, aiming to detect cancer lesions at
an early stage of their development and provide an overview of the results of Polish research on the knowledge of breast self-examination techniques, awareness of women surveyed regarding the age at which breast self-examination should be started, the frequency with which a breast examination is performed, knowledge of risk factors for breast cancer or symptoms of breast cancer.

Risk factors for breast cancer

Based on numerous studies and long-term observations a number of factors were extracted that contribute to an increased risk of breast cancer (Fitzgibbons et al. 2000). One of the major risk factors predisposing to the development of breast cancer is the female gender, and age (Bouchardy et al. 2007). What is important for determining the risk is also family history and genetic predisposition (Rouzier et al. 2004). An important role in the pathogenesis of malignant tumor growth in breast is played by estrogen. Epidemiological studies confirm that increased exposure to endogenous and exogenous estrogens increases the risk of breast cancer (Narod 2001). Fewer menstrual cycles multiply the risk compared to women whose menarche appeared at a later age and who experienced early menopause (Leung et al. 2008). The age of the first childbirth, especially the first pregnancy after age 30 also has an impact on breast cancer risk (Xue et al. 2007).

Currently, more often the relationship between the risk of cancer and the consumption of carbohydrates is recognized. It has been shown that there is a link between the consumption of products with a high glycemic index (GI), elevated insulin levels and insulin resistance and an increased risk of breast cancer (Jonas 2003). In studies involving 2,569 women with breast cancer a direct relationship between the consumption of carbohydrates with a high GI and the risk of cancer was reported (Tavani et al. 2006).

It was also found that there is a link between obesity and the growth of breast cancer, particularly in postmenopausal women (Fair 2007). Several years of observations of a group of 1,500 patients diagnosed with breast cancer showed a significantly increased risk of death when BMI ≥ 30 kg/m² compared to those with a BMI <25 kg/m² (Dal Maso 2008). A pooled analysis of 8 cohort studies involving 340 thousand women showed an increased risk of breast cancer by 30% for BMI ≥ 28 kg/m² compared with BMI <21 kg/m² (Zatoński 2012). Researchers (Lorincz, Sukumar 2006) explain this increased amount of estrogen secreted from fat cells, predisposing to breast cancer. This confirms the higher level of sex hormones circulating in the blood of obese women, compared with women with normal body weight and is in women before and after menopause.

Anatomy of the breast

Women’s breasts are made from the skin, subcutaneous tissue, blood vessels, lymph vessels and nerves. Located on the chest wall lying at the level of the III to VI or VII rib (Fig.1) They are adjacent to the back surface of the pectoralis major muscle fascia, fascia pectoralis minor and in the side to the front toothed muscle fascia. Inside the breast is composed of the breast gland which consists of 15 -20 tapering lobes of glandular tissue, which are arranged radially around the nipple. Wart is surrounded by a circular shell nipple, characterized by strong pigmentation, where there is an outlet of the modified sebaceous glands, the so called Montgomery glands (Fig.2). A proportion of the female population has an additional piece of mammary gland called the tail of Spence within their armpit. Within the flaps one can distinguish smaller structures called lobules or lobes. They consist of groups of milk-secreting glands surrounded by connective tissue (Tortora, Derrickson 2008).
Each lobe contains a milk line, which extends into a bay milk through its outlet on the nipple. These gulfs with sectional order from 5 to 8 mm and an average length of 12 mm end at the base of the nipple stenosis. The areas between lobes of glandular tissue are filled with fat. It also creates a protective layer around the mammary gland (Tortora, Derrickson 2008).

Describing the location of tumors in the breast conventionally divided it into quadrants, respectively central (KC), the top-side (KGB), the upper-medial (KGP), the bottom-side (KDB), the lower-medial (KDP) (Figure 3).
Methodology of breast self-examination

According to the recommendation of Polish Gynaecological Society on prevention and early diagnosis of breast gland changes, it is advised in case of women above 20 years old to do a breast self-examination regularly once a month. Menstruating women should perform the examination on the second or third day after the menstruation, however, pregnant women and women after the menopause should always do it on the same day of a month (Spaczyński 2005).

Self-control of a breast consists of a visual examination and a palpatory examination. The visual examination is done in a standing position in front of a mirror. Woman watching her breast should: hold her upper limbs along the torso (Fig. 4 a), raise her upper limbs (Fig. 4 b), clutch her upper limbs behind the head (Fig. 4 c), rest her upper limbs on hips (Fig. 4 d). During the examination in positions listed above, we examine the outline and symmetry of mammary glands, skin changes such as red marks, ulceration, spreading of hypodermic veins, the decortication or linear skin rupture, the presence of callosities, tubercles or tubercle masses, the retreating of a nipple, the secretion from the nipple a pathological discharge, moving the nipple in relation to the teat line (Lewandowskí 2007).

Figure 4. The visual assessment of a breast gland
Source: own elaboration.

The palpatory examination is done in a sitting or lying position. The examination in a lying position is essential to check the quadrants of a breast gland. In 50% cases a breast tumour is found in a superiolateral quadrant. Almost 20% of tumours are located within the limits of a nipple or a nipple areola, 15% in a superioparacentric quadrant, 11% in an inferolateral quadrant. The fewest, only 6% of tumours are located in an inferoparacentric quadrant (Fig. 5). The examination is done by circular movements, pressing the breast flat arranged fingertips II to IV (Lewandowskí 2007).
During the examination in a sitting position we conduct such movements as: a transverse stroking of a breast gland (Fig. 6 a) and a spiral stroking of the breast gland from the nipple to breast circumference. The right breast we examine in a clockwise direction, the left one - in counter clockwise direction (Fig. 6 b), a radial stroking of the breast gland from the nipple to the breast circumference (Fig. 6 d), a radial chafing of the breast gland from the nipple to the circumference (Fig. 6 e) and the breast gland pressing in order to check the nipple discharge (Fig. 6 f). We finish the examination checking the state of lymph nodes (Lewandowski 2007).

The review of research results on a breast self-examination

The assessment of women's knowledge on breast self-examination was the subject of numerous research which is shown in the references (Tab. 1). Numerous observations and studies show that the participation of
health service workers in education on a breast cancer prevention is insignificant (Tab. 2). In connection to it, the scheme of the breast self-examination should be widely propagated among women, manly by GPs.

Indeed the active participation of every woman in the nipple cancer prevention mainly depends on information from doctors (Karczmarek-Borowska et al. 2013).

Table 1. The review of studies on the assessment of women’s knowledge on breast self-examination

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<th>Knowledge of breast self-examination techniques - results of surveys</th>
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<td><strong>Publication</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mazurkiewicz et al. 2014</td>
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| Zych et al. 2006     |  - 19 - hormone replacement therapy  
|                      |  - 34 - drinking alcohol  
|                      |  - 35 - a high animal fat content in a diet  
|                      |  - 42 - hormonal disorders  
|                      |  - 53 - stress  
|                      |  - 3 - early menstruation  
|                      |  - 4 - first pregnancy at late age  |

The knowledge of symptoms of a breast cancer - results of surveys

Publication | The number of women having knowledge of the breast cancer symptoms in %
-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------
Karczmarek-Borowska et al. 2013 | 66 - the presence of hard, painful tubercles
| 79 - skin changes around the nipple and a discharge from the nipple
| 60 - the breast shape changes
| 73 - the presence of tubercles
| 40 - the discharge from the nipples
| 35 - the enlargement of lymph nodes in the armpit
| 22 - the asymmetry and oedema of a breast

Paździor et al. 2011
| 96 - the presence of painful tubercles
| 72 - the secretion from the nipple
| 61 - the nipple changes
| 61 - the breast shape and size changes
| 35 - the enlargement of lymph nodes in the armpit
| 22 - the asymmetry and oedema of a breast

Nita et al. 2010
| 96 - the presence of painful tubercles
| 72 - the secretion from the nipple
| 61 - the nipple changes
| 61 - the breast shape and size changes
| 35 - the enlargement of lymph nodes in the armpit
| 22 - the asymmetry and oedema of a breast

Zych et al. 2006
| 84 - the presence of painful tubercles
| 67 - the secretion from the nipple
| 33 - the breast arrangement changes

Synowiec-Pilat 2001
| 76 - the presence of painful tubercles

Table 2. The review of studies on sources of knowledge of a breast cancer prevention

The knowledge sources of the breast cancer prevention - results of surveys

| Publication          | The knowledge sources of breast cancer prevention in %
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------
| Karczmarek-Borowska et al. 2013 | 79 - media  
|                        | 65 - women magazines  
|                        | 28 - a doctor  
|                        | 38 - the internet  
|                        | 33 - TV  
| Wołowski 2012        | 17 - a doctor  
|                        | 34 - the internet  
| Lewandowska 2011     | 20 - medical literature  
|                        | 10 - a doctor  
|                        | 57 - press  
| Paździor et al. 2011 | 57 - TV  
|                        | 19 - a doctor  
| Tomczyk et al. 2011  | 84 - mass media  
| Przysada et al. 2009 | 77 - TV, press, radio, family and acquaintances  
|                        | 4 - a doctor  
| Turczak 2006         | 47 - brochures and leaflets  
|                        | 30 - media  
|                        | 22 - a doctor  
|                        | 61 - leaflets  
| Zych et al. 2006     | 57 - press and television  
|                        | 20 - a doctor  |
Summary

The review on conscious prevention of a breast cancer made by authors of this paper shows that vast majority of women in Poland knows a lot about breast self-examination techniques (over 80%), but considerably less women know when this examination should be started and with what frequency it should be done (around 47% and 40% respectively). Large group of women knows about factors increasing the risk of a breast cancer. The childlessness (80%), genetic factors (60%), unhealthy lifestyle, stress, wrong diet, stimulant consumption, overweight (from 37 to 53%) predispose to breast cancer. Among minor factors hormonal disorders (42%), to less physical exercises (24%), early menstruation and first pregnancy in a late age (17 and 9% respectively) are mentioned.

Polish women declare in surveys that they know quite a lot about the breast cancer symptoms. First of all they mention the presence of hard, painful tubercles inside the breast limits (85%) and the discharge from the nipple (64%). Not so often they point to the skin changes around the nipple (60%) and changes of the breast shape and symmetry (60%). More seldom the respondents point to the enlargement of lymph nodes in the armpit (35%).

On the basis of epidemiological studies, the American National Cancer Institute assessed that the risk of a breast cancer is increasing with age (Horner et al. 2009). Incidents of a breast cancer which occur at the age below 35 are estimated at only 1-3% cases. Considerable increase of incidents number of a breast gland cancer takes place after the age of 50. Percentage of women who are reported as ill with this cancer at the age 50-59 is as high as 32% of all the cases (Mamrocka-Mączka 2013).

Healthy behaviours are related to the level of knowledge the society has about the diseases and the methods of their prevention (Dobrzyń et al. 2003). From analysis of available papers and carried out research it follows that the women’s stage of knowledge about the breast self-examination requires continuation on a wide scale of information actions in order to cause changes in attitudes to one’s own health. The early discovery of pathological changes in a breast gland by women belongs to cheap and simple methods of early diagnosis of cancerous changes and in this way it results in a decrease of the risk of having this cancer and increases the chances of recovering from it. It is noticed that an average diameter of a tumour detected by women who examine their breast on a regular basis is 12 mm, and an accidentally detected tumour in women who never did a self-examination has an average diameter of 40 mm (Karczmarek-Borowska et al. 2013). Studies by Fostera, Constanza (Fostera, Constanza 1984) showed that 5 years survival of patients with a breast cancer was 18% higher in case of women doing a self-control in comparison to women not doing this examination.

In light of research the level of knowledge doesn’t depend on age or education. This is why the knowledge about methodology of breast self-examination should be spread, which is a very important element of a cancer prevention.

Conclusion

The knowledge of the breast cancer prevention should be far more propagated, more trainings on the risk factors ought to be conducted and also women’s healthy behaviours in the scope of early breast cancer diagnosis should be promoted, paying special attention to breast self-examination.

References:


**Internet sources:**