



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Breast Cancer Foundation Puts the Spotlight on Breast Cancer in Young Women

Singapore, 27 July 2020 – Breast Cancer Foundation has released a paper on “**Take Charge of Your Breast Health – Journeys of Young Women with Breast Cancer in Singapore**” that shares the journeys of 11 women who were diagnosed with breast cancer between the ages of 28 and 44 years old. The **objective is to raise awareness** of the increasing incidence of breast cancer in younger women and to emphasise the need to check and treat breast cancer at an early stage for improved survival rates.

Younger women have a higher incidence to suffer from more aggressive forms of breast cancer which include HER2+ subtypes and triple negative breast cancer. Breast cancer is the most common form of cancer amongst women in Singapore and accounts for 1 in 6 cancer deaths amongst women here. More than 2,000 women in Singapore are diagnosed with breast cancer each year of which 1 in 6 cases occur in women under 45 years old.

This paper is an informative and useful resource for women between 20 and 45 years old addressing their concerns and issues of breast cancer as a disease. 11 brave young women with breast cancer have shared their personal stories on how breast cancer had impacted their lives.

“I never thought I could get breast cancer” is the common refrain expressed by these courageous ladies who shared their breast cancer journeys. Breast health is often the last thing on the minds of these young women.

“The message we want to share is clear. Breast cancer does not discriminate, regardless of age. Vigilance through regular breast checks is key for early detection,” said **Staphnie Tang, President, Breast Cancer Foundation**, “When a younger woman contracts breast cancer, her challenges are very different. Her psycho-emotional needs often result in a myriad of decision stress points she has to grapple with at this stage of her life - from career goals to fertility and pregnancy, from finances to managing symptomatic crisis mindsets. BCF recognises this and has since established the Young Women Support Group to provide a safe eco-network for these young survivors to find an empathetic listening ear, exchange experiences and information while supporting one another on their journeys together. I am grateful to Roche Singapore Pte Ltd whose support allowed BCF to publish this paper and make a public outreach on this subject.

“We are delighted to have the opportunity to work with the Breast Cancer Foundation on this important project. Aggressive forms of breast cancer remains a major public health challenge and we believe there is still much to do to improve early detection, treatment outcomes and survivorship of breast cancer patients in Singapore. The stories in this paper highlight the impact breast cancer has on so many young women and their families and we hope this can trigger meaningful conversations between different stakeholders on how we can work together to do more in our fight against this disease.” - **Ryan Harper, General Manager, Roche Singapore**.

This paper will be released on 1 August 2020 and will be available on www.bcf.org.sg.

Please see following Annexes for more information:

Annex 1 - Breast Cancer Foundation Reaches Out To Young Women

Annex 2 - Factsheet: Breast Cancer Foundatio



About BCF

Breast Cancer Foundation (BCF) is a social service agency with the mission to eradicate breast cancer as a life-threatening disease. Set up in 1997, BCF is committed to raising awareness about breast cancer through talks, events and publications that advocate early detection through regular screening, as well as supporting survivors and their families through various befriending, training and wellness activities. As one of the few advocacy groups in the world with a Men Support League that was integrated with Caregiver Support Group in year 2017, BCF aims to encourage greater male participation in society's fight against this affliction.

For more information, please visit www.bcf.org.sg. For updates on BCF's latest work and initiatives, follow BCF at @Breast Cancer Foundation (Facebook) and @bcfsg (Instagram).

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Annex 1 - Breast Cancer Foundation Reaches Out To Young Women

In a **Situation & Needs Assessment Survey on Breast Cancer** in Singapore conducted by BCF in 2017, it was found that while the majority of respondents regarded breast cancer to be important and dangerous and 60% of women aged under 45 had expressed limited knowledge on breast cancer. More than 4 in 5 women cited that they did breast checks after they heard of someone or personally knew someone who has breast cancer.

BCF developed a 2-pronged approach to widen outreach and raise awareness amongst young women in the community as well as to provide the support network for afflicted young women and to encourage them to share their stories. Expanded programmes include the Young Women Support Group which has close to 200 members; activities with a focus on issues pertinent to them such as fertility, sex, work and family; platforms for interaction such as WhatsApp and a closed group account on Facebook. BCF Befriender Programme which provides one-on-one support to those who are newly diagnosed, has young befriender volunteers to support their fellow warriors in need of psycho-emotional support and encouragement. BCF members also actively volunteer at our outreach events to share their personal breast cancer journey to inspire others to take care of their breast health.

"Take Charge of Your Breast Health – Journeys of Young Women with Breast Cancer in Singapore" shares the journeys of 11 women who were diagnosed with breast cancer between the ages of 28 and 44 years old.



Majority of them were diagnosed in their late 20s and suffered aggressive forms of breast cancer or were at an advanced stage of breast cancer. Four are single and six have children. Some of the ladies remain under treatment while one of them had passed on before this paper come to fruition.

Here are some excerpts of their journey:

“My doctor advised me to have a mastectomy. My parents asked our religious teacher, a Ustaz, who said that if it harms your health, you have to let it go for the better of yourself. This gave me some peace to go ahead. On the day of the surgery, my breasts were full with milk like those of a new mother would be. But I could not breastfeed. I felt guilty that I could not provide my baby with the best.” – Bella (not her real name), married and mother of three, had to grapple with difficult decisions including inducing an early labour when she was diagnosed at 29 years old.

“My battle scars are a reminder that I’ve survived and I’m a warrior with a story to tell. I want women out there to know I understand what you’re going through. It’s not the end of the world. There is life after cancer.” - Tracy Hoo, who was diagnosed at 29 within her first year of marriage, and is now an active BCF Befriender and survivor sharer at BCF’s Awareness Outreach events.

“For those with no cancer, don’t think it won’t happen to you. It can happen to anybody so do your regular checks. Don’t delay. If you discover anything suspicious, go get it checked because sometimes it’s the fear in us to know the truth that we keep delaying things, procrastinating. If you’re lucky like me, you discover it and feel it. For those who have breast cancer, take one step at a time and each day as it comes. No point worrying about things that you can’t control. Just be happy.” – Janet Ng, married and diagnosed with Breast Cancer at 42 years old, had also undergone surgery for benign breast lumps a decade before.

“Where did we go for help? Together, my husband and I decided to place a post on social media. At first, I was really against it. But my husband reminded me that people have been through this before and would have the knowledge. Why do we want to start from scratch? Some of our best recommendations on doctors came from there. My husband, son and true friends have been great pillars of support. Also, the kindness from fellow survivors - complete strangers at support groups and many others - have helped me in this journey. For these reasons, I want to be there for the newly diagnosed women who are feeling overwhelmed and to help them reduce their fear of the unknown.” – Amy Neary, married and diagnosed with breast cancer at 44 years old, is an active BCF Befriender and survivor sharer at BCF’s Awareness Outreach events.



Annex 2 - Factsheet: Breast Cancer Foundation

In 1997, Breast Cancer Foundation (BCF) was set up and it has remained as the only social service agency solely dedicated to breast cancer advocacy and support in Singapore. Fast forward 23 years on, BCF's mission remains relevant – to spread the lifesaving message of early detection through regular screening and to provide support for women diagnosed with breast cancer as well as their caregivers.

Key programmes at BCF include:

For those afflicted with Breast Cancer and their caregivers

- **Befrienders Programme:** BCF has a vibrant network of volunteer befrienders-survivors of breast cancer who are committed to share their experiences to caregivers and women diagnosed with breast cancer by offering their assistance and support via hospital visits (suspended currently with COVID-19 outbreak) and phone calls.
- **Support Groups:** The support groups provide an understanding and caring environment conducive for those affected by breast cancer. In 2017, the Men Support League was integrated with the Caregiver Support Group to enable both men and women caregivers to share their journey of providing support to loved ones with breast cancer. There are separate groups conducted in English and Mandarin and virtual sessions are also conducted weekly online.
- **Young Women Support Group:** In 2019, we launched the Young Women Support Group for women aged 45 years old and below, diagnosed with breast cancer. Younger women often face unique concerns upon diagnosis, like fertility, career concerns or guilt towards having to inform their parents of their condition.
- **Positive Appearance Scheme & Wig Loan Programme:** The Positive Appearance Scheme provides sponsorship of prostheses and bras for low-income women who are diagnosed with, or are survivors of, breast cancer. BCF's Wig Loan programme helps members regain and enhance their self-confidence by loaning them wigs for free when they start their breast cancer treatments and experience hair loss during the process.
- **Healing Through The Arts:** BCF firmly believes that life continues beyond breast cancer. Through shared activities in sports and arts such as dragon boating, sound therapy, crochet and ukulele, breast cancer survivors bond and find a new lease of life through the HTTA programme. The programme is exclusive to breast cancer survivors and features recreational and therapeutic activities aimed at rebuilding their physical and mental well-being for short- and long-term recovery. With COVID-19, some HTTA sessions are being conducted online.



For the Community

- **Breast Cancer Foundation Encouragement for Active Mammograms (BEAM):**

BEAM, jointly initiated in partnership with Health Promotion Board, has provided some 50,000 mammograms at no charge to low-income women who are Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS) cardholders since its inception in 2013. In July 2019, we announced an additional commitment of **\$1 million** over two years.

- **Community Mammobus Programme (CMP):** BCF launched CMP together with Singapore Cancer Society and National Healthcare Group to provide funding assistance to make mammogram screenings even more affordable to the community, exclusively on the Mammobus. There is no charge for first-time Singaporean participants and a nominal fee for repeat screeners. The Mammobus will be deployed to various locations across Singapore throughout the year.

- **BEEP (BCF Education and Empowerment Programmes):** Coping with breast cancer and its treatment can be difficult and the ability of all those involved to stay mentally strong and healthy is crucial. Unique to BCF, this integrated series is aimed at building the right support context for women with breast cancer. Programmes are also provided for caregivers, advocates, corporates and counsellors.

- **Awareness Outreach: Wear The Pink Ribbon (WTPR)** is an annual fundraising and awareness campaign organised by BCF as part of the **Breast Cancer Awareness Month (BCAM)** in October. Throughout the year, we also organise **Awareness Talks** and events as well as **Mammobus** deployments for corporates and the community. The objective is to highlight the potential threat of breast cancer, the importance of early detection and for women to take charge of their health with regular breast examinations.

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