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Awareness of breast cancer is important because the disease poses challenges and issues that are crucial to the future of women, particularly the younger generation



A GOOD CAUSE: All smiles from participants of the inaugural Unimas communication department's Pink Walk held at the university's campus to create awareness of breast cancer among students and staff.

WHILE others were going bald to raise funds in aid of cancer patients, third-year communications students from University Malaysia Sarawak's (Unimas) Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) organised a "Pink Walk" to create awareness of breast cancer.

They came as early as 7am for the inaugural walk at Unimas campus at Kota Samarahan and in keeping with the theme, most of them wore pink.

It was all systems go for the participants as they readied for the less than 2km breeze walking event, supported jointly by Malaysia's National Cancer Council (Makna) and Unimas' Women's Organisation (Masnita).

Encouraging response

With just 10 more minutes to the start, a total of 136 participants assembled for the flag-off by Unimas deputy vice chancellor, Professor Mohd Fadzil Abdul Rahman, accompanied by FSS head of department for communication, Associate Professor Dr Mus Chairil Samani.

The participants were earlier told the guests of honour, Unimas vice chancellor, Professor Datuk Dr Khairuddin Abdul Hamid, and his wife, Datin Dayang Mariani Abang Zain, who is also Masnita president, would be a bit late because of their delayed flight back to Kuching.

Initially, the organisers expected a crowd of 200 but they still could smile when the response was encouraging and even manage to collect close to their targeted amount in such a short time.

First of its kind

The organising committee, led by Ianabella Raeng, deserved a pat on the back for organising the event as part of their third-year group project.

In fact, similar events should be organised on a larger scale to promote greater awareness among university students of breast cancer, now affecting the younger generation as well.

The students were told similar charity walks were also held in Australia to create public awareness of the disease.

For the record, the organising costs were courtesy of Masnita and other sponsors with A Clouet & Co (KL) Sdn Bhd providing drinks as well as Ayam Brand sandwiches.

There were no winners but the participants enjoyed the lucky draw offering modest prizes.

Students' awareness

The students got to hear the real life experience of Datin Dayang Mariani who had undergone treatment for breast cancer, first diagnosed on the eve of Hari Raya Aidil Fitri 2010.

Despite lack of sleep and jet-lag, she was still bubbly and spoke on stage with zest on the subject very close to her heart.

"My world came to a stop when I was diagnosed with breast cancer," she said, trying to contain her emotions that touched her young audience.

According to her, those diagnosed with cancer are said to be living on borrowed time and each passing day is like watching sands in an hour glass slipping away.

Mariani who loves to jog every other day, spoke of the need for the young people to be aware of how to detect the early signs of breast cancer which accounts for a third of cancer cases among women, including the younger ones.

"Don't be shy when you take a look at yourself in the mirror," she said of the need for the students, particularly the younger girls, to personally observe whether there were any changes to their bodies.

She stressed the students should not only emphasise on their facial looks but also body parts which might be susceptible to breast cancer and early detection is important albeit initially, breast cancer may not cause any symptoms.

According to the American Cancer Society, any of the following unusual changes in the breast can be a symptom which, among others, includes developing a lump or swelling on all or part of the breast, skin irritation or dimpling, and a pain sensation felt on the breast or nipple which might be turning inward.

The Society also advocates that the earlier the detection, the easier the treatment.

Breast cancer in young women

According to Makna, most people tend to think some cancers, especially breast cancer, which affects millions around the world, only occur among women after 40 but there are cases involving girls as young as 17.

While younger women generally do not consider themselves at risk, breast cancer, however, can strike at any age, and women should be aware of their personal risk factors.

With five per cent of all breast cancer cases occurring in women under 40, the challenge in diagnosing the disease among them is more difficult because their breast tissue is generally denser than in older women.

Delayed diagnosis may cause future problems because many younger women suffering from breast cancer had ignored the warning signs such as a lump, swelling or unusual discharge.

Sadly, many women assume they may be too young to have breast cancer and tend to think any lumps or swellings are harmless cysts or other forms of growth.

There is a need for the younger generation to be made aware of breast cancer because it poses future challenges, particularly for younger women, as it can involve issues concerning their sexuality, fertility and pregnancy after undergoing medical treatment.

Early detection and prompt treatment can significantly increase a woman's chances of surviving. Over 90 per cent of women whose breast cancer is caught early, have a better survival rate.

extracted from theborneopost.