Addressing the unmet needs of Australian men diagnosed with breast cancer

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About BCNA
Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA) works to ensure that Australians affected by breast cancer receive the very best support, information, treatment and care appropriate to their individual needs.

>> Introduction
Around 150 men are diagnosed with breast cancer in Australia every year. While men make up less than one per cent of all Australians with breast cancer, a diagnosis can bring very specific challenges for men. It can be more difficult for men to access appropriate information, as well as emotional and social support.

In 2014 BCNA developed a booklet, Men Got Breast Cancer Too, for men diagnosed with breast cancer. This year, BCNA has undertaken more work to better understand the challenges men face, based on feedback from members suggesting that more can be done to improve outcomes for men.

>> Aims
This project aimed to identify unmet needs and challenges for Australian men diagnosed with breast cancer, and to identify what BCNA and the broader community can do to help men feel more included and supported. The project was not a representative, quantitative research project. Rather, it was a consumer consultation undertaken to inform program development and policy.

>> Methods
This consultation project involved in-depth telephone interviews with five men from around Australia who had been diagnosed with early or metastatic breast cancer, and a detailed literature review which focused on identifying broader issues and challenges for men diagnosed with breast cancer.

BCNA recruited men to take part in the interviews through our network of members, and through links with health professionals. Through the interviews, men were invited to talk about their diagnosis and treatment journeys, information needs, health care experiences, and gender, sexuality and identity issues that shaped their breast cancer experiences. The interviews also aimed to identify what BCNA, and the community more broadly, can do to improve outcomes and experiences for men.

>> Findings
From the interviews, men diagnosed with breast cancer told us their main challenges were:
- finding breast cancer information specifically for men
- delays in seeing their GP and being diagnosed
- dealing with the stigma of having what is seen to be a ‘woman’s disease’ locally
- feeling isolated and alone, due to a lack of support.

>> Conclusions/recommendations
This project highlights a set of factors which can enable improved inclusion and support for men diagnosed with breast cancer. Based on the findings of this project, BCNA recommends the following actions.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Recommendation 1:** Improve access to gender-appropriate information
Offer tailored resources for men as soon as possible after diagnosis, as they provide men with information that is designed to meet their specific needs. BCNA’s Men Get Breast Cancer Too book and Professor John Boyages’ book, Male Breast Cancer: Taking Control are two resources which men have told us are particularly helpful.

**Recommendation 2:** Raise public awareness of breast cancer in men
Highlight the signs and symptoms of male breast cancer, encourage men to seek medical advice early, and promote stories and accounts from other men which help to reduce the stigma of a breast cancer diagnosis.

When building public awareness, consider the ways in which men’s experiences might be included in mainstream events, such as the annual October breast cancer awareness month.

Identify and connect with men who are advocates in their local communities as these men can play an important role in awareness campaigns and providing peer support.

**Recommendation 3:** Improve access to psychosocial supports
Men should be screened for psychosocial distress after diagnosis, and should be offered information and/or referral to appropriate counselling or psychological interventions.

Encourage men to seek out cancer support groups, and provide information on local cancer support services. This may include breast cancer support groups that are inclusive of men, general cancer support groups, and recreational clubs such as breast cancer survivor dragon boating teams.

Online support groups and forums are a good way for men to access psychosocial support, if they cannot find other men to connect with locally.

Health professionals and patient organisations can play a role by connecting newly diagnosed men with other men who have been diagnosed with breast cancer, who are willing to offer informal peer support.

>> Further information
See BCNA’s Men with Breast Cancer web page at bcna.org.au.
The Executive Summary Report of this project can be found on the BCNA website, bcna.org.au.
You can order a copy, or download, BCNA’s booklet Men Get Breast Cancer Too at bcna.org.au.

>> Acknowledgements
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