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Breast cancer cases rise in Makkah region

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JEDDAH — The rate of breast cancer is on the rise in the Kingdom, especially in Makkah region. Dr. Malak Hasan, Director of the Radiology Department at King Abdulaziz University Hospital, said that a study conducted in 2000 showed that the breast cancer rate was 7.6 percent in the Makkah region. He stated that the rates have climbed in the past 10 years and a more recent study in 2011 found that 13.9 percent of women over the age of 40 living in Makkah were diagnosed with the disease. Dr. Elham Rawah, Consultant Radiologist at King Abdullah Medical City in Makkah, who is leading an early detection program that aims to increase breast cancer awareness, stressed the importance of early screening, and encouraged all women to receive a mammogram at the age of 40. She further said that 30 percent of women diagnosed with breast cancer discover the illness in its advanced stages, when it is difficult to treat. A major part of the breast cancer awareness campaign is educating the general public about the disease, its risk factors, and treatment options. "There are many false conceptions regarding breast cancer in the community that we must dispel, such as the belief that breast cancer is contagious or that mammograms cause breast cancer or that a benign tumor can switch to a malignant tumor or that breast cancer can be induced by a magical curse on someone or that the only treatment option is surgical removal of the breast," said Dr. Rawah. Women above the age of 40 or those with a family history of breast cancer or who have had their first pregnancy after the age of 30 or those who do not breastfeed their infants have a higher risk. In addition, a sedentary lifestyle and a diet high in saturated fats may be linked with breast cancer. Dr. Muhammad Al-Shabana, an oncologist at King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Center in Riyadh, said that a diet high in saturated fats in a girl's teenage years correlates with breast cancer later in life. Consumption of whole fat dairy products, meats, rich desserts, and fried foods should be reduced. The prime source of defense in breast cancer is prevention, and next is early detection. "Access to a mammogram is the right of every woman over the age of 40 in the country. If the breast cancer is diagnosed in its initial stages then there is an 85 to 90 percent chance of survival and complete recovery. The effectiveness of treatment declines when the breast cancer is discovered in its later stages," said Dr. Rawah. Dr. Al-Shabana recommends that women should regularly perform a breast self-exam after the age of 20, and it should be done five or seven days after menstruation. Unusual lumps, changes in skin, a discharge, or a mass in the armpit region are symptoms for identification. Although they may be harmless, they should still be reported to the physician for further investigation. A breast cancer survivor, obstetrician, gynecologist, and Assistant Professor at King Abdulaziz University, Dr. Samia Al-Amoudi, has learned from her personal experience that a woman affected with breast cancer needs a lot of support from her family and friends. Dr. Al-Amoudi reminds Saudi women, who are always concerned with the health of their children, husbands, parents and relatives, that they should not neglect their own health and should go for regular checkups.

