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BREAST CANCER PREVENTION CAMPAIGN IN BRAZIL: AN EXPERIENCE REPORT

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Abstract: Introduction: For the prevention of breast cancer, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends mammography coverage of 70% among women aged 50 to 69. However, in 2022, Brazil recorded a coverage of only 17% of this population. Given this scenario, the Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas (PUC Campinas) organized the Breast Cancer Prevention Campaign, aiming to provide quality information to the population and free mammograms on the day of the campaign. **Methods:** The campaign was organized by medical students from PUC Campinas, members of the International Federation of Medical Students Association (IFMSA). The event was developed over three months by a five-member organizing committee and held on a single day with the participation of 12 volunteers and a mobile mammography unit. Prior to the campaign day, all students involved participated in a preparatory class on breast cancer and, on the day of the event, distributed pamphlets and invited women within the indicated age range (50 to 69 years) to undergo mammography. **Results:** A total of 30 women over the age of 50 were approached by the 17 students, and 15 mammograms were performed at the campaign site. **Discussion:** The development of an awareness campaign not only impacts the target audience, but also trains students on topics of high social importance and stimulates the development of leadership skills, which is why it is extremely necessary within educational institutions. Furthermore, as mammography coverage in Brazil is below that suggested by the WHO, the issue becomes even more important for the country, and awareness campaigns help to provide quality information to the population. **Conclusion:** The campaign achieved its objectives

of training students, contributing to public awareness, and providing free mammograms in a satisfactory manner that can be replicated in other institutions.

Keywords: breast cancer; public health; awareness; medical education.

Introduction

According to the Overview of Breast Cancer Care in the Unified Health System (SUS), in 2022 Brazil recorded a worrying rate of 17% coverage of mammograms for women between 50 and 69 years of age [1], which, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), should be 70% [2].

The current scenario, caused by misinformation among the population and/or difficulty in accessing screening, especially in more remote locations, results in late diagnosis, in stages 3 and 4 of the disease, which correspond to 42% of cases, according to Datasus [3].

In view of this, medical students from PUC Campinas, members of the International Federation of Medical Students Association (IFMSA), developed the “Breast Cancer Prevention Campaign,” an awareness project that aims to provide quality information to the population, addressing topics such as prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of breast cancer, and providing mammograms through a mobile mammography unit.

The development of campaigns such as this is important not only for the qualification of medical students, but also to provide knowledge to the population and thus contribute to the UN’s 2030 agenda [4], especially in goals 3 and 4, “Good heal-

th and well-being” and “Quality education,” respectively.

Methods

The “Breast Cancer Prevention Campaign” was developed by an organizing committee composed of five members three months prior to the main day. Through online meetings, the students decided on the location of the campaign, made a form available for other students to apply as volunteers, secured the participation of a mobile mammography unit, developed and printed pamphlets, invited the gynecology and obstetrics resident from the Jundiaí Medical School to provide a training class on the topic, and scheduled the dates for the class and the event.

The training class was held online less than a week before the campaign so that students could receive the most up-to-date information and retain this knowledge more effectively until the day of the event. The event took place in person in the recreation area of the Sagrada Família Community Church in Campinas, where the 17 students (members of the organizing committee and volunteers) were joined by 30 women and, through informal conversation, addressed topics such as prevention, self-examination, diagnosis, and treatment of breast cancer. In addition, all women over 50, 15 in total, were invited to have a free mammogram, performed by an ultrasound technician in a mobile mammography unit, the results of which were made available later, after medical analysis.

Results

The campaign was carried out with the participation of 17 medical students, a mobile mammography unit, and an ultrasound technician. A total of 30 local residents were approached and received information about breast cancer, and 15 of them, all between the ages of 50 and 69, were invited to undergo imaging tests.

The campaign empowered students on this socially significant issue and stimulated the development of leadership skills, which is extremely necessary within educational institutions. On the other hand, the campaign allowed the population to receive accurate information and free screening, which are fundamental components for breast cancer prevention in Brazil.

Discussion

Low mammography coverage in Brazil is a significant challenge for the early detection of breast cancer. According to the Overview of Breast Cancer Care in the Unified Health System (SUS), in 2022, only 17% of women between the ages of 50 and 69 had mammograms, while the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends 70% coverage. This scenario highlights the urgent need to raise awareness and increase access to the exam, since mammography is the main method for early diagnosis of the disease, a determining factor in reducing mortality.

In addition to low coverage, lack of information and difficulties in accessing the exam are barriers that contribute to late diagnosis. According to Datasus, 42% of breast cancer cases in Brazil are detected in advanced stages (3 and 4), which sig-

nificantly reduces the chances of effective treatment and patient survival. Given this scenario, initiatives aimed at disseminating information and offering free exams become essential tools to combat misinformation and increase women's adherence to preventive practices.

The Breast Cancer Prevention Campaign, by combining health education and screening exams, contributed to this purpose. The delivery of informational materials, discussion groups, and the availability of free mammograms enabled a comprehensive and accessible approach, promoting the population's understanding of the importance of early diagnosis. Direct interaction between participants and the organizing committee, composed of SCORA members and volunteers, facilitated the exchange of knowledge and clarification of doubts, strengthening the impact of the action.

The results obtained confirm the effectiveness of this strategy, as the impact assessment carried out by the event participants shows an increase in knowledge about breast cancer after the action and women's adherence to regular mammograms, demonstrating that initiatives of this type are fundamental to changing the national scenario. In addition, the active participation of health professionals in this campaign provided an enriching learning experience, broadening their understanding of the importance of health education and a humanized approach to preventive care.

Given the Brazilian reality of low mammography coverage and misinformation, awareness-raising and early screening actions are essential to transform this scenario. The success of the campaign reinforces the ongoing need for initiatives that promote access to information and encourage ef-

fective preventive practices. Thus, strategies that combine education and health services should be increasingly encouraged, aiming to reduce late diagnosis rates and improve clinical outcomes for breast cancer in Brazil.

Conclusion

The breast cancer awareness campaign successfully achieved its objectives, promoting essential information on prevention, risk factors, and signs and symptoms of the disease to the general population. The approach combined theory and practice, ensuring that participants assimilated the content in a clear and applicable way to their daily lives. The demonstration of self-examination, accompanied by illustrative materials, reinforced the importance of regular monitoring of women's health.

In addition, the distribution of educational pamphlets made it possible to expand the impact of the campaign, allowing knowledge to be shared with an even larger audience. The offer of free mammograms also stood out as an essential strategy for early screening, enabling the identification of possible cases and appropriate referral for medical follow-up.

Despite specific challenges, such as the delay in starting activities due to participants arriving late, the action went according to plan, fulfilling its purpose of informing and promoting women's health. This reaffirms the importance of preventive and educational initiatives in the fight against breast cancer, highlighting the essential role of awareness in reducing mortality and encouraging early diagnosis.

Acknowledgments:

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