Global Task Force on Expanded Access to Cancer Care and Control in Developing Countries

10 Facts about Breast Cancer*

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1) Breast cancer is the leading cause of death by malignant tumour in women, both at the global level and in each of the regions, with the exception of the poorest ones. 1,2,3,4

2) In developing countries, the disease is concentrated in young women. In middle and high-income countries, it figures as one of the principal causes of death in young women. Globally, it is the fifth cause of death for women between 30 and 59 years of age. In North America, Western Europe, and the West Pacific, it is the primary cause of death; in Latin America, it is the third; and in the Middle East and parts of Eastern Europe and Asia it figures as the fourth or fifth cause of death.1,4

3) In low and middle-income countries, women under the age of 54 represent 2/3 of all diagnoses, while in high-income countries they represent only a third.1,3

4) The total number of new detected cases in 2008 rose to almost 1.4 million and 55% of these were diagnosed in women who live in developing countries.1,3

5) The number of deaths in 2008 is estimated at 456 million. The age-adjusted rate for women over 15 globally is 18 for every 100,000, with a range of 9/100,000 in Western Asia to 28/100,000 in Southern Africa.1,3

6) The mortality gap between countries by income level is significant; and an astounding 68% of deaths occur in developing countries.1,3

7) Given the lack of access and treatment in developing countries, a higher percentage of women who suffer the disease die as a result of it. In North America the ratio between the mortality and incidence rates is 0.22; in Latin America and the Caribbean it is about 0.32, while in Sub-Saharan Africa it is 0.55.1,3,5

8) The age of death by breast cancer is significantly less for women in developing countries. In high-income countries 80% of breast cancer deaths occur in women aged 55 and over, while in low and middle-income countries 45% of deaths occur in women aged 55 and over.1,3

9) Between 60 and 80% of breast cancer deaths worldwide are preventable - with early detection and/or treatment. Some 70 – 75% of preventable deaths occur in developing countries.1,4,6

10) Detected on time, breast cancer is curable. 98% of women diagnosed in phase 0-1 of the disease will be alive in 5 years.5

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1. Estimates by Héctor Arreola-Ornelas, Oscar Méndez, Felicia Marie Knaul, Mexican Health Foundation and the Harvard Global Equity Initiative.

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