

Earlier detection for men is vital to increase survival rates for male breast cancer

6 March 2015

Every week in Australia, three men will be diagnosed with male breast cancer.

In 2014, it was estimated that about 15,270 Australian women were diagnosed with [breast cancer](#) and the annual incidence of men is about 150 or 1% of all breast cancers.

Although male breast cancer is rare, it's important to talk about it, as the latest statistics show that in six out of 10 men (60%) diagnosed with breast cancer, the cancer had already spread beyond the breast (to adjacent lymph nodes or other parts of the body) compared to 45% of females with breast cancer.

According to Professor John Boyages, Professor of Breast Oncology, at the Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences at Macquarie University, large differences on how early male breast cancer is detected compared to female breast cancer is a contributing factor in differences in survival rates between men and women with breast cancer.

In his new book released today, *Male Breast Cancer: Taking Control*, Professor Boyages summarises evidence and explains that for many men with breast cancer, the diagnosis is delayed because of lack of awareness by the community as well as health professionals about this rare condition.

"I have seen many patients who have seen their doctor with a lump or a discharge from their nipple, to be told that it was a fatty lump or "man boobs" or enlarged tender breasts due to a hormone imbalance or medications," says Professor Boyages.

Male breast cancer survivor and former Premier of New South Wales the Hon. Nick Greiner, writes in his foreword to the book, "Someone commented that Nick Greiner and breast cancer don't belong in the same sentence... It is important that men feel

comfortable to talk about it, to note that this can happen, and not to ignore the medical signs, as we men have a tendency to do!"

Mr Greiner ignored his initial signs, a spot of blood on his shirt front, even visiting his GP who said it was probably "topical" and gave him some cream but advised that he could get a mammogram as blood could be an ominous sign. Yet feeling no discomfort and never having encountered a man with breast cancer, he did not act. Then about six months later, he felt the dreaded lump and had a mammogram and a biopsy confirmed cancer. While some men do not find out until the cancer has spread, Mr Greiner underwent a mastectomy in April 2014 and remains fit and active.

Another problem with early detection in men is embarrassment. Research has shown that men with a breast lump often associate this with being feminine and are often treated differently by health professionals. Even though men can easily have a mammogram, this is often viewed as a female test and there is often reluctance for a man to attend a breast clinic.

"Earlier detection means better survival. If a man finds a lump in their breast see your general practitioner as soon as possible and seek a second opinion if no tests are ordered.

It's vital that men have as much information as possible to ensure they get the best conventional treatment but also knowing what they can do for themselves," says Professor John Boyages.

Professor John Boyages, or John as he is known to his patients says there can be a lot of stigma for men when they are diagnosed with breast cancer as it is seen as female disease. He hopes to help break down this stigma by offering the first book on breast cancer dedicated to men where they can get specific information for male breast cancer and avoid pamphlets designed for females. He explains

that after reading the book, [men](#) and their families and loved ones will:

- Know the difference between "man boobs" and male breast cancer.
- Have the right tests for an earlier diagnosis.
- Avoid under- or overtreatment.
- Ask your treatment team the right questions.
- Choose treatments for your breast and lymph nodes.
- Deal with stress, anxiety, fatigue, and sexuality during and after treatment.
- Understand when chemotherapy is really required.
- Get specific up-to-date information for [male breast cancer](#) and avoid pamphlets designed for females.
- Achieve a more positive state of mind through inspiring and motivating patient stories and key take-home messages.

Provided by Macquarie University

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