



Breast cancer in Ghana: Why do women with breast cancer symptoms not get diagnosed after initially seeking medical care?



E. Waruiru Mburu^a, Adwoa Bemah Boamah Mensah^b, John H Amuasi^b, Carolyn M. Porta^c, Baffour Awuah^{de}, Ernest Osei-Bonsu^e, Beth Virnig^a, Shalini Kulasingam^a

^a University of Minnesota School of Public Health; ^b Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology; ^c University of Minnesota School of Nursing; ^d Ghana Ministry of Health; ^e Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital

INTRODUCTION

- More than 50% of breast cancer patients in Ghana are diagnosed with late stage disease.
- Once they have noticeable symptoms, most women in Ghana first seek medical care at community or district health facilities where they are either referred to a tertiary level facility for breast cancer diagnosis or they go back home.

AIM

- To identify factors that prohibit women with breast cancer symptoms from being accurately diagnosed after initially reaching a healthcare facility.

METHODOLOGY

- Interviewed 26 women (mean age 47 years and age range 33 –63 years) diagnosed with breast cancer between 2016 and 2019.
- All were receiving treatment at Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital (KATH) in Ghana.
- Main question: Please tell us the story of your journey from when you detected bodily change to when you started receiving breast cancer treatment.
- A quasi-deductive coding analytic process was used.
- NVivo 12plus computer software was used to facilitate analysis organization.

FINDINGS

Once at the health facility patients were examined and either:

- referred for diagnostic evaluations at private laboratories and clinics
- referred to a tertiary hospital for further examination
- assured that the symptoms were benign

Table 1: Factors that contributed to patients regressing from seeking more health care

	Factors	Sample quotes from study participants
1	Denial	“I was thinking that maybe they were jumping to conclusions too much. I was still thinking it might be lymph, not cancer” Pt 8 33 years old
2	Financial difficulty	“When they said they will take a sample, I said ‘OK, I have heard you but I don’t have the required amount with me so I will come back” Pt 23 38 years old
3	Misdiagnosis	“I thus took it to a midwife who declared there was nothing wrong ...that it could be that, due to my advanced age, the breasts were drying out” Pt 3 58 years old
4	Preference for alternative types of care (e.g over the counter medication, spiritual or traditional medicine)	“So when I left (the hospital), I didn’t go anywhere else but I bought a cream that I used to smear on it.” Pt 23 38 years old “I ventured into herbal medicine for a long while..when it comes to drinking a concoction, she didn’t give me anything like that but something to rub on the breast, that’s what she gave me” Pt 5 63 years old
5	Fear of surgery	“..he said he would conduct an operation on me, but I didn’t agree to it...Because if I get operated on, won’t I die?” Pt 26 44 years old

CONCLUSION

- We highlight complex interplay between patient factors and health system factors that negatively influence women with breast cancer symptoms from being diagnosed once they seek care.
- Insights gained from this study should inform strategies to reduce any community or system-level barriers to identifying and diagnosing breast cancer among women in Ghana.

REFERENCES

- Clegg-Lamptey J, Dakubo J, Attobra YN. Why Do Breast Cancer Patients Report Late or Abscond During Treatment in Ghana? A Pilot Study. Ghana Medical Journal. 2009;43(3):127-131
- Mensah A, Yarney J, Nokoe KS, Opoku S, Clegg-Lamptey JN. Survival Outcomes of Breast Cancer in Ghana: An Analysis of Clinicopathological Features. Vol 032016

FUNDING

• Research reported in this publication was supported by the Fogarty International Center of the National Institutes of Health under grant #D43TW009345 awarded to the Northern Pacific Global Health Fellows Program and the University of Minnesota's CGHSR Scholars Program. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.

CONTACT INFORMATION

- E.Waruiru Mburu
Mburu@umn.edu