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Paper: Diversity

Clinically benign breast lumps - how often are they malignant?

Breast cancer in women is a major public health problem throughout the world. One in ten of all new cancers diagnosed worldwide each year is a cancer of the female breast. Diagnosis of breast cancer is done by triple assessment considering clinical/cytological and radiological behaviour of a breast lump. First encounter of patients with a breast lump is commonly with a primary care physician in our clinical practice.

The objective of this study is to assess the case load of carcinoma of the breast presenting as clinically benign breast disease.

Retrospective analysis of data from the breast cancer registry (1999-2011) of the Professorial Surgical Unit, NCTH was done. Examination findings of all the patients in the registry were analyzed. Patients who presented a single, well defined, firm, freely mobile breast lump with no nipple discharge or palpable axillary lymph nodes were considered to be clinically benign.

Study population consisted of 145 patients (n=145) with a mean age of 53.23 years and a range between 30-84 years. 12 (8.27%) patients with a mean age of 48.33 years presented with above mentioned criteria. With completion of triple assessment, all of them were diagnosed to have carcinoma of the breast.

In our setting about 1 in 10 patients with a carcinoma of the breast may present as having a benign breast lump clinically. Thus it is important to conduct cytological and radiological assessment in all patients presenting with a breast lump especially after the age of 40.