BREAST CANCER DIAGNOSTIC METHODS: SCREEN-DETECTED AND CLINICAL CASES. AN ITALIAN SURVEY OF WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES

Paolo Giorgi Rossi1, Laura Camilloni1, Paola Mantellini2, Vincenzo Barile3, Piero Borgia1, Antonio Federici4, Marialuisa Mangia5, Eugenio Paci2, Alessandro Vella6, and Marco Zappa2

1Agency for Public Health, Lazio Region, Rome; 2Centro per lo Studio e la Prevenzione Oncologica, Florence; 3Azienda Ospedaliera S. Carlo, Potenza; 4Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CCM), Ministry of Health, Rome; 5Coordinamento Screening ASL Roma B, Rome; 6Coordinamento Screening ASL Roma H, Albano, Rome, Italy

Aims and background: The real practice of breast cancer diagnosis and treatment is often very different from guideline recommendations. Screening programs should minimize deviations from “best practice”. The aim of the study was to compare cases detected by screening programs with cases that were not part of the public screening program, analyzing the diagnostic pathways from the first suspected breast problem to therapeutic intervention for breast cancer.

Methods: We interviewed a random sample of 268 women aged 49-70 years in three Italian regions (Lazio, Tuscany, Basilicata) who were treated for breast cancer, stratified by screening participation.

Results: In the nonscreened group, 48% of women were symptomatic and 50% were diagnosed by preventive tests. The proportion of women treated within 30 days of diagnosis was significantly lower in the screened group, 21.3% vs 35.8% (P = 0.0003). The mean number of tests (mammography, ultrasonography, cytology and histology) performed in the screened group was significantly higher than in the nonscreened group, 3.7 vs 2.8 (P = 0.001). The percentage of women treated without a preoperative histological or cytological diagnosis was lower in the screened group than in the nonscreened group, 14% vs 25% (P = 0.024).

Conclusion: Participation in screening programs seems to lead to more appropriate disease management even for breast cancer cases treated at the same hospital.

Key words: breast cancer, disease management, mammography, screening.

Funding: The present work was partially funded by the Italian Ministry of Health with the grant (Progetto di ricerca finalizzata ex art. 12 – 2002) “Valutazione HTA dei percorsi di screening del tumore della mammella e confronto con i percorsi clinici per i casi sintomatici” [HTA evaluation of breast cancer screening procedures and comparison with clinical procedures for symptomatic cases].

Correspondence to: Paolo Giorgi Rossi, Agency for Public Health, Lazio Region, Via di S. Costanza 53, 00198 Rome, Italy. Tel +39-06-83060438; fax +39-06-83060463; e-mail giorgiorossi@asplazio.it

Received September 11, 2006; accepted March 2, 2007.