

Breast cancer survivors urge women in the Middle East to seek timely screening

Author:

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DUBAI: Breast cancer is the most common form of the illness diagnosed in women worldwide. If caught early, the prognosis for survival is reassuringly high. But a lack of awareness, common myths and fear of bad news causes far too many women to delay getting checked.

In Arab countries, breast cancer is the most frequently diagnosed form of the disease. One recent study found 17.7 to 19 percent of all new cancer cases across the region in 2018 were breast cancer diagnoses.

That is why every October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, when experts meet to discuss the latest treatments, charities raise awareness and private clinics offer special discounts on tests and screenings.

Cancer survivors are frequently asked to share their experiences, whether in small private groups or at large public gatherings, and the distinctive pink ribbon synonymous with the cause proliferates on blouses and lapels the world over.

While pandemic restrictions have forced many events online, this year has been no exception. And the message is getting across. Oncologists, surgeons, radiologists and other medical practitioners in the field are often fully booked this time of year.

"I think the essence is to try and get the whole world to just refocus," Dr. Millicent Alache Bello, a renowned breast surgeon at King's College Hospital in Dubai, told Arab News.

"It is important all through the year that breast education and breast awareness continues. However, a specific month for people to just refocus and take stock is vital."

Women are recommended to begin getting annual mammograms from the age of 40, when the likelihood of developing breast cancer increases.

"In this part of the world, screening is not something done nationally. Screening is done ad hoc, meaning people go when they feel like it," said Bello.

In the UK, general practitioners working for the taxpayer-funded National Health Service keep detailed medical records on every patient and remind them when they are due to receive a screening exam. This is not the case in Arab countries, where health services are insurance-based.

King's College Hospital in Dubai wants to imitate the British system and to begin reminding its patients when they are due a check-up. It has already started compiling patient data and will soon offer mammograms at a cost of AED 350 (\$95).

Routine check-ups and on-time screenings pay off. "The point where a woman feels a lump in her breast is not the point when the breast cancer started," Bello warned. "Sometimes, it started before that period, anything up to 12, 14 or 24 months earlier."

That is why it is so important to get screened regularly before the trouble signs emerge.

Catherine, a British cancer survivor in her 40s, says she used to be disciplined with her screening appointments, often getting tested twice a year. But after having children, she began neglecting her checks. It was during this six-year window that she developed a lump.

"I was so busy being a mom, I just forgot about myself," Catherine told Arab News. By the time she was diagnosed, the tumor in one of her breasts already measured eight centimeters in diameter.

After a double mastectomy, the pathology report showed her other breast also contained three cancerous lumps. "I was very pragmatic about it. I didn't feel this massive emotional connection to my breasts. If they try to kill me, they have to go," she said.

Women should not make the same mistake and neglect their health, she says, even when other life pressures take over. Now Catherine devotes her time to charity work during Breast Cancer Awareness Month to raise funds and awareness.



Joining her is Ghozlan, an Arab woman and fellow survivor, who says she discovered a lump in her breast while exercising. She traveled to Europe for treatment and opted for reconstruction.

“I am a woman who cares about her femininity and I can’t live without it,” Ghozlan told Arab News, describing her breast implant, which must be replaced every 10 years. “It was not what I expected. It wasn’t a great result but it is better than nothing. I have been through hell, and now I accept what I have. I am living with it, but I have some side effects because of the implant.”

Ghozlan is now anxiously awaiting her next check-up with her doctor in Europe, which had to be pushed back due to coronavirus travel restrictions.

Another woman fundraising for Breast Cancer Awareness Month is Gina, a 58-

year-old who, like Catherine, underwent a double mastectomy. Unlike Ghozlan, she was unable to undergo reconstructive surgery.

“Due to my autoimmune disease, the chances of the prosthesis being rejected by my body was very high,” Gina said. “It was not my voluntary choice. It was a shock to me. I must admit, even today, after five years, I have not 100 percent accepted this situation.”

Breast Cancer

- * 2.1m Women diagnosed with breast cancer each year.
- * 627,000 Estimated breast-cancer deaths in 2018 (WHO).
- * 50 Age above which women are most at risk.
- * 17.7-19% Share of all cancer cases in Arab world in 2018.
- * 20% Drop in mortality due to regular mammograms (WHO).

Gina has since resigned from her job to commit herself entirely to charity work.

With the evolution of technology and other scientific advancements, doctors are getting even better at detecting potential problems – faster and more accurately.

The triple assessment – clinical examination, imaging and biopsy – has changed little over recent years, but equipment offering more sensitive scans has developed in leaps and bounds while surgery techniques have become more refined.



Participants take part in the Pink Caravan Ride in Dubai, a UAE breast cancer initiative. (AFP/File Photo)

“It is the oncology, the medicine we give for hemotherapy and the endocrine treatments – they have moved on in quantum leaps, which is fantastic news,” said Bello.

Scientists have come to understand that treatment plans are not always the same for all breast cancer patients and that the most effective surgeries and therapies are unique to the individual.

“No two women have the same breast cancer,” said Bello. “Every woman’s cancer is different because the genetic composition is different. This is why people are doing better now, because the treatment is tailored individually.”

But this can also mean reconstruction surgery is not an option for everyone, and is dependent on body type, the extent of the cancer, the patient’s medical history and personal preference.



A picture taken on October 1, 2020 shows the Eiffel Tower illuminated in pink to mark the start of “Octobre Rose” (Pink October) or Breast Cancer Awareness Month in Paris. (AFP/File Photo)

“Reconstruction is designed to improve your well-being; it is not supposed to interfere with cancer treatment,” Bello said.

High-income countries in Europe and North America appear to have much higher rates of breast cancer largely because screening and early detection are so prevalent. With a more limited testing capacity, the Arab world appears to have a lower rate of cases – but also a high mortality rate.

A retrospective epidemiological study conducted in 2012 found that breast cancer was the leading cause of death among Saudi women.

However, a paper published in 2018 by the Journal of Epidemiology and Global Health said: “Although the incidence of breast cancer in Arab countries is rising, it is still less than the global average and only one-fifth of that in Western Europe.”

But now is not a time for complacency. Breast Cancer Awareness Month is a reminder to all women to get themselves checked and for governments to invest in clinics and vital research.

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Saudi Arabia's public spaces dotted with pink for Breast Cancer Awareness Month
Saudi health campaigners think pink for breast cancer awareness month

[Israeli envoys will travel to Sudan for normalization deal, Netanyahu says](#)

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Reuters

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Sat, 2020-10-24 18:51

JERUSALEM: An Israeli delegation will travel to Sudan in coming days after the two countries agreed to take steps to normalize ties, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Saturday.

The agreement, brokered with the help of the United States and announced on Friday, made Sudan the third Arab government to set aside hostilities with Israel in the last two months.

"An Israeli delegation will leave to Sudan in the coming days to complete the agreement," Netanyahu said at a news conference.

It was unclear, however, how long it will take for an accord to be completed. The military and civilian leaders of Sudan's transitional government have been divided over how fast and how far to go in establishing ties with Israel.

The Sudanese premier wants approval from a yet-to-be formed parliament to proceed with a broader, formal normalization, and that may not be a quick process given the sensitivities and civilian-military differences. It is unclear when the assembly will be created.

US President Donald Trump's decision this week to remove Sudan from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism paved the way for the accord, marking a foreign policy achievement for the Republican president as he seeks re-election on Nov. 3, trailing in opinion polls behind Democratic rival Joe Biden.

Trump sealed the Israel-Sudan agreement in a phone call with Netanyahu and Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and Transitional Council Head Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, in which he said: "Do you think 'Sleepy Joe' could have made this deal?"

Netanyahu, reliant on bipartisan support for Israel in Washington, responded haltingly: "Well, Mr. President, one thing I can tell you, is ... we appreciate the help for peace from anyone in America."

Asked at Saturday's news conference whether he was embarrassed by Trump's question, Netanyahu said: "It is very difficult to embarrass me," and stressed he was grateful to Trump for his policy toward Israel. "I hope this policy will continue. I don't want to make any prophecies about the election results."



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US says Sudan to normalize ties with Israel, in new breakthrough for Trump
Donald Trump says Sudan will be removed from terrorism list

[New truce in Abyan brings peace to southern Yemen](#)

Sat, 2020-10-24 21:20

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen's soldiers and separatists agreed on Friday to put into place a "comprehensive and permanent" truce in the southern province of Abyan and other contested areas, local army commanders said on Saturday.

The fresh announcement about halting hostilities comes as Maen Abdul Malik Saeed, prime minister-designate, is closing in on announcing the formation of a new shared government agreed under the Saudi-brokered Riyadh Agreement.

Military units loyal to the internationally recognized government received on Friday orders from the government to immediately put into place a truce, ending military alerts that have been in place in the province of Abyan for months.

“We have received orders to end combat standby state and put into place a comprehensive and permanent truce in the province,” a local government military officer in Abyan, who preferred to remain anonymous, told Arab News on Saturday. “It seems that the politicians in Riyadh reached an agreement,” the officer said, referring to the continuing new government consultation between Yemeni rivals.

Forces from the pro-independence Southern Transitional Council (STC) said that they received similar orders from their commanders to end hostilities in Abyan.

The Yemeni government and separatists have been at war during the past couple of years.

Aimed at ending the STC’s unilateral self rule in southern provinces, the government launched a military offensive in May in Abyan that has claimed the lives of dozens on both sides.

In July, Saudi Arabia, which brokered the Riyadh Agreement in late 2019, proposed a new mechanism for accelerating the implementation of the agreement which led to Yemen’s President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi mandating Maeen Abdul Malik Saeed to form a new government and the naming of a new governor and chief of security for Aden.

On the ground, the Kingdom has deployed military officers to monitor a truce between the rivals and the implementation of military and security arrangements under the deal.

The premier-designate is putting the final touches on his consultations with Yemeni parties on a new government as major ministries were distributed between Yemen’s big and small parties, two sources told Arab News on Saturday.

“A new government might see light this week as combat forces will simultaneously pull out of contested areas and join fighting against the Houthis,” a senior STC source in Riyadh, said preferring anonymity.

Military and security arrangements under the deal, such as the STC withdrawal of military units from Aden, the country’s interim capital, and Abyan, have long blocked the formation of a new government as the legitimate government insists on the implementation of the security and military side of the agreement before announcing the agreement.

To end the impasse, the rivals agreed to announce the government this week, coinciding with the withdrawal of forces from Aden and Abyan, sources told Arab News.

Government and STC sources in Riyadh said that under the current

consultations, Yemen's president would pick names for four "sovereign" ministries – defense, interior, finance and foreign affairs.

The STC was given the ministries of transport, social affairs and labor, civil service and insurance, agricultural and fisheries, as well as the ministry of public works and highways.

The remaining ministries were distributed between the General People's Congress that has ruled Yemen for three decades, the Islamist Islah Party, the Socialist Party, the Islamist Rashad Party and Hadramout Inclusive Conference.

Reacting to the news of a new government announcement and the halt of hostilities in their province, people in the contested areas in Abyan voiced hope that the factions would this time become serious and end fighting in their areas. "We are tired of fighting. We want to return to our normal life," a man from Abyan's Shouqra, who asked to remain anonymous, told Arab News.



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Fighting resumes in Abyan as separatists pull out of talks
Yemen army troops briefly capture major city in Abyan

France recalls Turkey envoy after Erdogan 'mental health' jibe at Macron

Author:

Fulya OZERKAN and Laurence BENHAMOU in Paris | AFP

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Sat, 2020-10-24 17:51

ISTANBUL: France on Saturday said it was recalling its envoy to Turkey for consultations after comments by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan suggesting French counterpart Emmanuel Macron needed a mental health check-up that Paris condemned as unacceptable.

France and its NATO ally are at loggerheads over a range of issues including maritime rights in the eastern Mediterranean, Libya, Syria and the escalating conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh.

But Ankara has now been particularly incensed by a campaign championed by Macron to protect France's secular values against radical Islam, a debate given new impetus by the murder this month of a teacher who showed his class a cartoon of the prophet Mohammed.

"What can one say about a head of state who treats millions of members from different faith groups this way: first of all, have mental checks," Erdogan said in a televised address in the central Anatolian city of Kayseri.

"What's the problem of the individual called Macron with Islam and with the Muslims?" Erdogan asked.

"Macron needs mental treatment," Erdogan added, while indicating he did not expect the French leader to win a new mandate in 2022 elections.

In a highly unusual move, a French presidential official said that the French ambassador to Turkey was being recalled from Ankara for consultations and would meet Macron to discuss the situation in the wake of Erdogan's outburst.

"President Erdogan's comments are unacceptable. Excess and rudeness are not a method. We demand that Erdogan change the course of his policy because it is dangerous in every respect," the official told AFP.

The Elysee official, who asked not to be named, also said that France had noted "the absence of messages of condolence and support" from the Turkish president after the beheading of teacher Samuel Paty outside Paris.

The official also expressed concern over calls by Ankara for a boycott of French goods.

Macron this month described Islam as a religion "in crisis" worldwide and said the government would present a bill in December to strengthen a 1905 law that officially separated church and state in France.

He announced stricter oversight of schooling and better control over foreign funding of mosques.

But the debate over the role of Islam in France has hit a new intensity after the beheading of Paty, which prosecutors say was carried out by an 18-year-old Chechen who had contact with a jihadist in Syria.

Turkey is a majority Muslim but secular country which is a part of NATO but

not the EU, where its membership bid has stalled for decades over a range of disputes.

“You are constantly picking on Erdogan. This will not earn you anything,” said the Turkish leader.

“There will be elections (in France) ... We will see your (Macron’s) fate. I don’t think he has a long way to go. Why? He has not achieved anything for France and he should do for himself.”

The other new rift between the two leaders is over Nagorno-Karabakh – a majority ethnic Armenian breakaway region inside Azerbaijan, which declared independence as the USSR fell, sparking a war in the early 1990s that claimed 30,000 lives.

Turkey is strongly backing Azerbaijan in the conflict but has denied allegations by Macron that Ankara has sent hundreds of Syrian militia fighters to help Azerbaijan.

Erdogan on Saturday accused France – which along with Russia and the United States co-chairs the Minsk Group tasked with resolving the conflict – of “being behind the disasters and the occupations in Azerbaijan.”

He also repeated previous claims that France, which has a strong Armenian community, is arming Yerevan. “You think you will restore peace with the arms you are sending to Armenians. You cannot because you are not honest.”

But the Elysee official said that Erdogan had two months to reply to the demands for a change in stance and that it ends its “dangerous adventures” in the eastern Mediterranean and “irresponsible conduct” over Karabakh.

“Measures need to be taken by the end of the year,” said the official.



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Turkish Cypriots elect Erdogan's candidate amid east Med tensions
Macron says beheaded teacher was victim of stupidity, hate

[Algerian president, 75, self isolates as pandemic spreads](#)

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Sat, 2020-10-24 15:48

ALGIERS: Algeria's 75-year-old President Abdelmadjid Tebboune is self isolating because some officials in "upper ranks of the government" are sick with COVID-19, he said in a Tweet on Saturday.

Tebboune took office in December in an election that came amidst months of mass protests which forced his predecessor Abdelaziz Bouteflika from power after 20 years.

"I assure you, my brothers and sisters, that I am well and healthy and that I continue my work," he said, saying his decision was taken on the advice of medical staff.

The global pandemic struck Algeria's economy as it faced long-term challenges posed by the decline of the oil and gas revenues that finance its historically lavish state spending.

So far, Algeria has officially confirmed more than 55,000 cases of the coronavirus with nearly 2,000 deaths.

Though the pandemic forced an end to the weekly mass protest marches through Algiers and other cities that lasted for more than a year, the political challenges remain.

Tebboune has pushed for changes to Algeria's referendum to limit presidential terms while expanding the powers of the parliament and judiciary.

However, many people in the leaderless protest movement believe their core goals of replacing the old ruling elite and forcing the army to stay out of politics remain unmet.

Algerians will vote in a referendum on the new constitution on Nov. 1, with Tebboune and the country's powerful army generals seeking a high turnout in order to turn a page on the protests.



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Algerian actresses call foul on femicide Algeria confirms Tebboune as new president, despite protests