

Breast cancer ravaging more

By Wang Shanshan (China Daily)

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On the day women are marking their achievements, they are also in urgent need of protection.

With fatal diseases afflicting more women at a younger age, medical professor Ha Xiaoxian made a plea for a nationwide study on women's health at the annual session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top advisory body.

"Victims of breast and cervical cancers in China have been increasing at an alarming rate during the past two decades, and the situation will only worsen if no precautions are taken," said Ha, a renowned researcher of gynaecological diseases at the Chinese Medicine Institute in Tianjin.

Statistics from the Shanghai public health bureau show that the ratio of breast cancer victims per 100,000 women almost tripled from 1992 to 2002.

What's more, although the most likely age of contracting breast cancer is between 35 and 45, hospital reports nationwide are showing that more and more women in their late 20s and early 30s are falling victim to the disease.

"Action should be taken as soon as possible because in these cases, time really does mean life for women," Ha said on the eve of International Women's Day.

While victims' chances of survival diminish in a couple of months, all it takes is 40 minutes to determine whether a woman has got the nightmarish disease.

"The 40 minutes felt longer than four years," said Xia Xiaoyu, a 31-year-old taxi driver who went to a hospital after finding a lump in one of her breasts.

"I couldn't help burst out crying in joy the moment the doctor told me it was not cancer," she said. "I went to the hospital before the lump turned into cancer."

But many other women are not as lucky. Of all cancers, breast cancer emerged as the No 1 killer of Chinese women as early as 1992, although people have begun to pay closer attention only in the past few years, according to Sun Qiang, director of a research centre on breast diseases at Peking Union Medical College Hospital.

But there are no national figures on its occurrence, he said.

According to Shanghai public health bureau statistics, for every 100,000 women in the municipality, 18 women contracted the disease in 1992, 38 in 1997 and 52 in 2002.

As for the rapid increase in the incidence of cancer, Sun attributed it primarily to rising pressure in urban women's lives, to the proportion of protein and fat in their diets and to environmental pollution.

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