Evaluation of breast cancer awareness among female university students in University of Sharjah, UAE

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Objective: The objectives of this study were to assess the knowledge of breast cancer among female students at the College of Pharmacy at the University of Sharjah, UAE and to evaluate the impact of the intervention program designed by the researchers on the student’s knowledge on the disease risk factors, screening methods, and their perception towards its treatment outcomes.

Method: A cross-sectional questionnaire survey of a convenience sample of 166 pharmacy students (n=110; 4th year) and (n=56; 5th year) in the University of Sharjah, Sharjah, UAE. The 26-item questionnaire covered the personal information and socio-demographic characteristics, breast cancer general knowledge, knowledge of breast cancer risk factors, knowledge of breast cancer symptoms and screening tests, and perception of management and outcomes of breast cancer.

Key findings: A total of 120 pharmacy students from 4th year (n=70) and 5th year (n=50) had completed the survey for the pre-intervention phase of the study. For the post intervention phase of the study, only 63 students from 4th year and 48 students from 5th year returned their completed questionnaire, giving a response rate of 90% and 96% respectively. Almost one quarter 59 (25.5) of the students included in the study reported that they have had a history of breast cancer in their family respectively. A high proportion 206 (89.2%) of the students from both levels showed their interest to participate in activities to promote breast awareness, despite the fact that almost three quarter 161 (70%) of them reported that they have never been participated in any of previous breast awareness programs. The awareness of students under investigation about self-examination clearly improved at the end of the study period. Eighty (66.7%) of the students from both levels reported that the breast self-examination is recommended for female "Once a month". This figure was increased to 103 (92.8%) post the intervention sessions (P value $\chi^2=<0.001$).

Conclusion: The high incidence of breast cancer in the UAE may be attributed to the low level of awareness of the disease among females. The lessons learned from this study provide a clear understanding of the importance of raising awareness about breast care among the health care providers first, specially the newly graduates, then among women in our community and to encourage them to report any unusual changes in their breasts to their family or care physicians.

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