

ABSTRACT

Knowledge, Attitude And Practices Of Female Health Workers Of The Westmoreland Public Health Services Regarding Methods Of Early Detection Of Breast Cancer

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Death from breast cancer is the number one cause of deaths from cancers in Jamaican women. Early detection lends itself to an improved survival rate because tumours are smaller and at an earlier stage exhibit little if any spread to nearby glands.

A cross sectional investigation was conducted during the month of February 2003 among a stratified random sample of female health workers attached to the Westmoreland Public Health Services. The purpose of the study was to elucidate their knowledge, attitude and practices concerning methods of early detection of breast cancer. The study used a self administered questionnaire. Areas of focus included knowledge of recommended methods of breast cancer screening, personal practice of the health worker and their attitude towards breast cancer screening. Qualitative research involving two focus groups of female health workers was also done.

Knowledge of breast cancer screening was high among majority of the workers. The majority of workers practised breast self examination and clinical breast examination but more than half (66%), of those who were eligible to have a mammogram never had one. Of the three recommended methods of early breast cancer detection, only mammogram bore any significance with the factors assessed.

Health workers who were of the medical group, with less than 20 years of service and younger than 40 years, were more likely to participate in mammogram screening.

There is need for increased access to breast cancer screening facilities in the rural areas in order to enhance compliance. More creative and innovative strategies are needed to heighten the awareness of women and health workers in particular about the importance of compliance.

Keywords: Nalda Rodney-Peart; breast cancer screening; early detection; medical group, non-medical group