

## Grass Roots Citizen Demands and Actions

### THE NO MORE BREAST CANCER CAMPAIGN

The No More Breast Cancer campaign has its roots in the breast cancer prevention work begun in the early 90s by organisations like WEN, Free Radicals and The Ban Lindane Group in the UK.

Many of us involved in the campaign have been a part of this work since that time. Some of us are now trustees of the charity Breast Cancer UK, and part of an expanding alliance of campaign partners e.g. Scottish Breast Cancer Campaign, Women's Environmental Network.

Our over-arching aim to broaden the parameters of the breast cancer debate so as to achieve political change and make our contribution wherever we can- primarily in the UK.

### WHY A 'BREAST CANCER PREVENTION' CAMPAIGN? BECAUSE:

- Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women worldwide and in the UK where there has been an upward trend in incidence since 1971. The latest government data released in September this year show that more UK women than ever before are contracting the disease, and that lifetime risk has risen from 1 in 12 to 1 in 9 in the past 5 years.
- Every year 42,000 women and 300 men are diagnosed and 12,400 women die – that's more than 1000 per month. International Association for Cancer Research (IARC) figures for 2004 show an equivalent rise in Europe, where in 2004 breast cancer represented 27.4% of all female cancers and 17.4% of all deaths, and where 35% of cases occurred in women under 55 and 12% in women younger than 45.

### BECAUSE:

The escalation of this dread disease has caused us to focus only on disease management and NOT on disease prevention. How many of us actually think of breast cancer as a 'preventable' disease? If current trends are allowed to continue, The No More Breast Cancer campaign estimates that, in the next decade, up to 50,000 women a year in the UK could receive a breast cancer diagnosis.

We therefore advocate that while continuing to support every effort to improve the treatment and care given to women who contract the disease, we need also to be asking questions.

Questions to challenge our governments, key people with responsibilities for public and environmental health and members of the cancer establishment i.e. those who represent professional and patient organisations, who define and promote the mainstream view of cancer, who have close associations with industry and government.

Such as:

- Why are more and more women getting breast cancer?
- Why has breast cancer incidence risen so relentlessly since the 1970s?

A rise which can be partly, but not wholly, explained by greater breast health awareness, improved detection methods and an aging population. Fewer than 50% of diagnosed cases can be explained by the officially recognised risk factors understood to increase a woman's susceptibility to breast cancer e.g. body weight, late age pregnancy, diet.

What of the remainder?

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What risk factors have we overlooked?

Breast cancer is commonly described as a multi-factorial disease which can be influenced by genetic, hormonal, lifestyle and environmental factors.

All except 'environmental factors' are represented on official risk factor listings for breast cancer. Are environmental factors then the overlooked risk factors in breast cancer?

The No More Breast Cancer campaign argues that environmental factors - the missing category in the officially recognised listing of risk factors – can account for the remainder.

It must include cancer risks arising from chronic, life-long, multiple, low-level exposures to hundreds of man-made chemical compounds known to adversely impact on human health.

Regardless of where we live, work or play, we cannot evade the effects of hazardous chemicals in air, soil, water, food, fabrics, cleaning products, cosmetics, plastics, pesticides, solvents, packaging, perfumes, preservatives. In fact the home environment is now rated by environmental agencies as more hazardous to health than the external environment.

WHY is exposure to environmental toxins, and in particular to the man-made carcinogens linked to breast cancer, omitted from the officially recognised listing of risk factors? Scientific evidence supporting the connection between chronic, low level exposures to environmental toxins and reproductive cancers like breast cancer is overwhelming.

WHY is exposure to hormone disrupting chemicals omitted from the officially recognised listing of risk factors? Breast cancer is clinically defined as a hormone-dependent cancer.

On a daily basis we are unavoidably exposed to low-levels of hundreds of man-made chemicals with the proven capacity to mimic and disrupt the functions of our naturally produced hormones.

WHY is it that the only synthetic hormones recognised by government and cancer establishment to increase breast cancer risk are contraceptive pills and hormone replacement therapy (HRT)?

Man-made hormone-disrupting chemicals can now be found in measurable amounts in the blood and body tissues of all of us.

WHY do government and cancer establishment, consistently ignore or marginalize the work of scientists – particularly in the fields of toxicology and pathology – which is improving our understanding of the ways in which man-made toxins can and do affect breast tissues?

Both government and cancer establishment persist in refuting scientific evidence – some of which goes back 50 years - which implicates or strongly suggests the agency of manufactured chemical carcinogens and hormone disruptors in breast cancer.

We ourselves are accused of 'alarming women' when we bring prevention-related science to public attention.

WHY do government and cancer establishment persist in claiming that lifestyle factors e.g. late-age pregnancy, obesity, alcohol consumption, are exclusively the main causes of breast cancer and that escalating incidence is the result of lifestyle choices made by modern women?

This mainstream position is fiercely defended when challenged by new scientific data or by anyone seeking to open up the debate on additional causal factors or on prevention.

WHY don't government and cancer establishment include strategies for primary prevention in their management plans for breast cancer?

Confidently predicting a continuing rise in numbers of women affected, representatives of government and cancer establishment are currently promoting breast cancer as a chronic disease we must learn to accept and one which, like diabetes, will in future, be managed by life-long drug treatment.

## THE CAMPAIGN

Our campaign objective is to reset the UK breast cancer agenda to include and prioritise primary prevention. We see this as a first step towards reducing exposures to and health risks arising from man-made carcinogens and hormone disruptors in our everyday environment

We aim to do this via public information, mobilisation, media engagement and ultimately political change. In seeking serious attention and action for the primary prevention of a major 21<sup>st</sup> century disease like breast cancer, we realise the first hurdle we have to overcome is profound Ignorance – both public and political.

For example, In the UK, “pink” pressure casts the citizen in the breast cancer prevention role of fundraiser, mainly for research into cancer treatments. We are aiming to engage the public at a different level – to have them see a different view of breast cancer as an environmental disease which can also be influenced by hormonal, genetic and lifestyle factors.

The first leg of the campaign is getting the information out there, providing information we believe all women – indeed all society – have a right to know. Information that explains how our government condones our exposure to chemical hazards known to be harmful to human health and to our shared environment. And how certain of these chemicals can affect the onset and progression of breast cancer.

The No More Breast Cancer campaign started in September 2005 with the launch of the public information and campaign resource document ‘Breast Cancer: an environmental disease. The case for primary prevention’.

Pulling together the past 50 years evidence that makes the case and going on to look at the political status of breast cancer prevention in the UK, this document informs an evolving campaign which invites women everywhere to wake up to the political and economic realities of breast cancer prevention, to get informed, get angry and get active from their kitchens, factories, offices, computers and cafes.

It argues that:

We need to wake up to the fact that Ignorance Is not bliss. Ignorance is killing us Our own ignorance about the fundamental connection between environment and health, and the impact of one on the other, Is a major obstacle to gaining a place for the primary prevention of breast cancer (stopping breast cancer before it starts) on national cancer agendas.

We need to wake up to the fact that

Government silence, intransigence and inaction is killing us.

For example, the failure of governments:

- to acknowledge and act on existing evidence representing 50 years of scientific endeavour, showing links between environmental toxins and breast cancer
- to regulate the chemical industry in terms of health and environment protection
- to fund green chemistry research and enterprise
- to provide public information about man-made cancer hazards in the environment
- to act upon recommendations of august bodies such as The Royal Society and Royal Commission to reduce public health risks from exposures to carcinogens and hormone disrupting chemicals released to the environment.

By visiting our website you'll see we're encouraging women, as consumers, as citizens with voting power, and as the people most affected by this escalating disease, to: become equal

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partners in a debate which we can no longer allow to be dominated by government and the cancer establishment.

As a group we had had enough campaign experience to know that we cannot expect to see change and action at the political level without media interest in the campaign and massive support from an 'informed' public. Neither our opinion, nor the opinion of scientists has yet convinced decision-makers that breast cancer should be perceived as an environmental, and therefore largely preventable disease.

We argue that media-backed public opinion will. And public opinion plus public behaviour in the marketplace definitely will.

The campaign aims to:

- Promote public debates to challenge and counter numerous breast cancer myths perpetrated by key government representatives, cancer establishment, mainstream cancer organisations, industry and some media. A classic example - that breast cancer is self-inflicted as a result of lifestyle choices and therefore the fault of women themselves.

Also to maintain pressure on the UK government to:

- acknowledge its narrow focus on lifestyle in current breast cancer policy
- acknowledge the truth that no lifestyle change can prevent a woman getting breast cancer while cancer-causing agents are allowed to build up in the environment and in our bodies.
- acknowledge environmental toxins as the overlooked factors in the escalating incidence of breast cancer.
- revise the existing cancer plan to include primary prevention strategies..
- commit to real breast cancer prevention by making it a priority to eradicate manufactured cancer-forming and cancer-promoting agents from the environment.
- override industry resistance by signing up to REACH legislation.