

Organised nationwide breast cancer screening programme was introduced in Hungary in 2002

Imre Boncz

Zwahlen and colleagues published an excellent paper on the currently available scientific evidences and practical problems of breast cancer screening with mammography [1]. This article, in addition to its medical professional values, can be considered a high quality policy paper for countries considering introducing a nationwide breast cancer screening programme financed from public resources. Several countries (UK, Sweden, Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Iceland, Israel, Luxembourg, Netherlands) are listed in the paper as having nationwide breast cancer screening programme. Hungary is missing from the list because at the time when Zwahlen published his paper there were no publications in the international scientific literature on the Hungarian breast screening programme. We would like to provide some information on this.

Due to the fact that breast cancer represents large burden and public health challenge for the Hungarian society [2, 3], a pilot breast screening programme was established

in Hungary in 1995 financed partly from a loan from the World Bank. The National Health Insurance Fund Administration (Országos Egészségbiztosítási Pénztár, OEP), the sole health care financing agency in Hungary, carried out and published a health economics analysis on the cost-effectiveness of breast cancer screening. The cost of one life year saved varied between CHF 1,597 (1057 EUR, 946 USD) and CHF 4,984 (3299 EUR, 2955 USD) in 2001 [4]. After evaluating the results of the pilot screening projects, the Hungarian government decided on the introduction of a nationwide organized breast cancer screening programme, which started in January 2002. Women between the age of 45–65 years are invited to mammography screening by a personal letter, a two years screening interval is applied and two-view mammograms (the mediolateral oblique and a craniocaudal views) and double readings are standard. The cost of mammography screening and travelling costs for women are fully reimbursed by the National Health Insurance Fund Administration.

The coverage, calculated as the proportion of women resident who have had a mammogram at least once in the previous two years, more than doubled from 25.85% in 2000–2001 before the nationwide programme to 53.46% in 2002–2003 following the introduction of the organized nationwide programme [5]. The Hungarian breast cancer screening programme is under continuous monitoring and evaluation. Preliminary data show that usual performance indicators of the Hungarian programme are comparable with

the values of other countries [6], although in order to realize the potential benefit of reducing mortality, participation rate has to be increased.

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