Older women with breast cancer are still not receiving the support they need, new report claims

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The statistics surrounding older people and breast cancer are stark: more than half of breast cancer deaths in the UK are in women over 70.

By 2040, almost three-quarters of all women living with breast cancer in the UK will be aged over 65 but according to a new report from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Breast Cancer (APPGBC), this patient population is not being adequately provided for.

In 2013, the APPGBC led an Inquiry into older people and breast cancer with an aim to better understand the variations and barriers preventing all patients diagnosed with the disease having access to the services, treatments and care that benefits them most, regardless of their age.

The 'Age is Just a Number' report laid out a series of key recommendations with a view to improving services specifically for this patient population, representing the culmination of the findings of the Inquiry. Two years on, the APPGBC have reviewed the recommendations alongside the progress that's been made and found that – whilst steps have been made in the right direction – a lot of work still needs to be done.

In monitoring progress, the Group found the following:

· **Breast cancer awareness** – although initiatives such as Public Health England's 'Be Clear on Cancer - Breast Cancer in Women Over 70' campaigns have helped raise awareness of breast cancer amongst the older population, better targeted interventions must be put in place to raise awareness of the signs and symptoms of breast cancer in this group.

· **Frailty tools** – the APPGBC welcomes the significant efforts made by professional bodies to develop frailty tools to assess older women with breast cancer. These tools will allow women to receive treatment based on their fitness rather than their age and the APPG will be monitoring progress with great interest.

· **Breast cancer screening** – in its 2013 report, the APPGBC recommended that Public Health England's breast screening age extension trial should be extended to women aged 74-76. The Group is disappointed that this has not been taken forward and hopes that this issue can be addressed through the new Cancer Strategy, currently being produced.

· **Care and support** – it is clear that more needs to be done to ensure that cancer patients have access to the support services that they need in order for their cancer treatment to take place. This can include home support such as caring for dependents while someone needs treatment for breast cancer.

Steve Brine MP, Co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Breast Cancer (APPGBC), said: "We are concerned at the slow pace of change and the limited progress made on implementing the recommendations made by the Inquiry in 2013. Whilst some progress has been made, there is still a lot of work to do in ensuring that older people with breast cancer receive the care, treatment and support that is most appropriate to them and their circumstances.

"Now that we have identified where these gaps in service provision lie, the APPGBC will be playing an active role in following up these recommendations to ensure that all older breast cancer patients receive the care they need throughout the next parliament."

Pat Howe, 68, from Sheffield said: "I found a slight thickening above my nipple but didn't think it was anything to worry about. It was only after screening that I found out it was breast cancer. When the doctors told me, I sat there trembling on the bed. It was just before Christmas and I didn't want to spoil the festive period for everyone with my bad news.

"After my treatment I started volunteering to raise awareness about the signs and symptoms of breast cancer. It's such an important message. Women think it can't happen to them, and that it happens to someone else. But of course it can happen to anyone, and older women in particular need to be aware of this. Breast awareness is something I'm so passionate about, it only takes a couple of minutes and just being in the habit of checking regularly can make all the difference."

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Notes to Editors

For more information contact Felicity Norcott on 07778 682 001 / felicityn@breakthrough.org.uk.

About the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Breast Cancer (APPGBC)

· The APPG on Breast Cancer is a dynamic cross-party group, bringing together 65 MPs and Peers.

· Its aim is to raise awareness of breast cancer-related issues amongst parliamentarians and influence legislation and policy to improve the lives of people affected by the disease.

· The Group is chaired jointly by Steve Brine MP, Sharon Hodgson MP and Annette Brooke MP. Baroness Morgan of Drefelin supports the Group as Vice-Chair.

· The Secretariat to the APPG on Breast Cancer is provided by Breakthrough Breast Cancer and is supported by a stakeholder group made up of Breast Cancer Campaign and Breast Cancer Care.

About Breakthrough Breast Cancer

· Breakthrough Breast Cancer works to stop breast cancer for good by improving early diagnosis, developing new treatments and preventing all types of breast cancer.

· Breast cancer is not yesterday's problem; it's a disease that affects more women every year. Breakthrough Breast Cancer is working harder than ever before to stop women getting, and dying from, the disease.

· Over the last 15 years, we've invested £100 million into cutting-edge research – research that has resulted in major breakthroughs, some of which are now in clinical trials. We currently fund the work of more than 270 research scientists across the UK, with many based in the ground-breaking Breakthrough Toby Robins Breast Cancer Research Centre in London.

· The Breakthrough Generations Study – set up in 2004 – is world's largest and most comprehensive study into the causes of breast cancer and is following more than 113,000 women throughout their lives.

· Breakthrough Breast Cancer and Breast Cancer Campaign are joining forces in 2015 to become the UK's largest breast cancer research charity. Our joint ambition is that by 2050, no one will die from breast cancer – find out more.

· For more information about Breakthrough Breast Cancer, visit breakthrough.org.uk or follow us on Twitter or onFacebook.

About Breast Cancer Campaign

· Breast Cancer Campaign funds innovative breast cancer research, bringing together the brightest minds to share knowledge to produce better, quicker results to overcome and outlive breast cancer.

· As of November 2014, Breast Cancer Campaign funds 86 research projects across the UK and Ireland, an investment of over £14 million.

· The Breast Cancer Campaign Tissue Bank, the UK's first ever national breast cancer tissue bank, is a unique collaboration with four leading research institutions to create a vital resource of breast cancer tissue for researchers across the UK and Ireland. Visit breastcancertissuebank.org

· Breast cancer is the most common cancer in the UK and accounts for nearly one in three of all cancers in women. In the UK, over 50,000 new cases of breast cancer are diagnosed each year - that's 138 a day.

· Breakthrough Breast Cancer and Breast Cancer Campaign are joining forces in 2015 to become the UK's largest breast cancer charity. United, we will achieve our shared ambition that by 2050 no one will die from breast cancer.

· Visit breastcancercampaign.org or follow us at twitter.com/bccampaign

About Breast Cancer Care

Breast Cancer Care is the only specialist breast cancer support charity working throughout the UK. We were founded in 1973 by Betty Westgate, who was herself diagnosed with breast cancer. In the ensuing forty years we have supported millions of women and their families through our face-to-face, phone and online services. We also provide training, support and networking opportunities to specialist breast cancer nurses, and Breast Cancer Care publications are used by the majority of breast cancer units throughout the UK. We campaign for better support and care and promote the importance of early detection, involving people with breast cancer in all that we do. Visit www.breastcancercare.org.uk or call our free helpline on 0808 800 6000.

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