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GYNAECOLOGY

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## Breast Self-Examination : Knowledge and Performance in Climacteric Women

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective** To determine the knowledge and performance of breast self-examination (BSE) among the climacteric women attending the menopause clinic.

**Design** Retrospective descriptive study.

**Setting** Menopause clinic, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Ramathibodi Hospital.

**Subjects** Two hundred and sixty-seven women who came to menopause clinic at the first visit and responded the designed questionnaires before physical examination from June 1995 to March 1996.

**Results** According to the advantage of BSE, 70 percent of the respondents reported that BSE assisted them to feel any changes in their breasts quickly. Seventy-six percent reported BSE helped in early detection of breast tumour. Nearly sixty-five percent knew that BSE should be practised once a month. Not more than 33.3 percent knew the best time to do BSE. Regarding to BSE performance, only 33.3 percent had done monthly BSE. Twenty-two percent were found masses or cysts during BSE and confirmed by the physician thereafter.

**Conclusion** Two-third of the respondents knew the advantage of BSE and one-third knew the best time to do, but there were few of them to perform BSE regularly. According to the results, the education to develop awareness and the encouragement to perform BSE effectively are still needed for woman health promotion.

**Key words :** breast self-examination, knowledge and performance, climacteric women

Breast cancer is currently reported as a major problem of women in Thailand. In Ramathibodi Hospital, breast cancer was reported the

second rank of the ten leading sites of cancers in women from 1990 to 1994.<sup>(1)</sup>

The incidence of breast cancer has been

progressively increasing in the climacteric women.<sup>(2)</sup> Therefore, women who attend the menopause clinic must have breast examination including specific investigation. Furthermore, the screening procedure for early detection of any changes of the breasts should be introduced to them. Breast self-examination (BSE) is the preventive behaviour that performed by the woman herself for early breast lump discovery.<sup>(3)</sup> BSE is an easy inexpensive and noninvasive method, which requires little time or physical energy.<sup>(4)</sup> It is recommended to help women to detect the early breast cancer.

This study aims to determine the knowledge and performance of breast self-examination among the climacteric women attending the menopause clinic, Ramathibodi Hospital.

## Materials and Methods

The designed questionnaires with the demographic data, family history related to cancer, past experience of breast operation, the knowledge of BSE about the advantage, importance and time to perform, including BSE performance were distributed to the first visit women attending menopause clinic. The respondents answered the

questionnaires before physical examination. Two hundred and sixty-seven questionnaires were analysed.

## Results

### Description of the sample

Nearly sixty-six percent (65.6%) of the respondents were 45-54 years of age and mean age were  $51.4 \pm 5.6$  years (range = 40-72). Fifty-two percent graduated from the university and 25.5 percent reported preliminary level or under. Fifty-four percent worked for the government and 24.7 percent were housewives. According to the result, they were postmenopause (59.4%), perimenopause (27.1%) and premenopause (10.9%).

In relation to family history which related to cancer, most of the participants (86.9%) reported no history of malignancy and 9.7 percent had history of various types and sites of cancer. Only 3.4 percent reported breast cancer history in the family.

Eighty-six percent of the women reported no previous history of breast operation. Twelve percent had mass breast excised and 1.1 percent had mastectomy done (1 simple mastectomy and 2 radical mastectomy) as well as needle aspiration.

**Table 1.** Knowledge and performance of BSE

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<b>BSE 1</b>	You can find any changes earlier by self examining your breasts.
<b>BSE 2</b>	BSE is the method available for discovering breast tumour at an early stage.
<b>BSE 3</b>	Every woman needs to perform BSE once a month.
<b>BSE 4</b>	The best time to perform BSE is 7-10 days after menses.
<b>BSE 5</b>	Postmenopausal woman or who have had hysterectomies should examine their breasts on the same day each month.
<b>BSE 6</b>	You have performed a monthly BSE regularly.
<b>BSE 7</b>	You had found a lump while practising BSE.
<b>BSE 8</b>	You have your physician confirmed after the finding.

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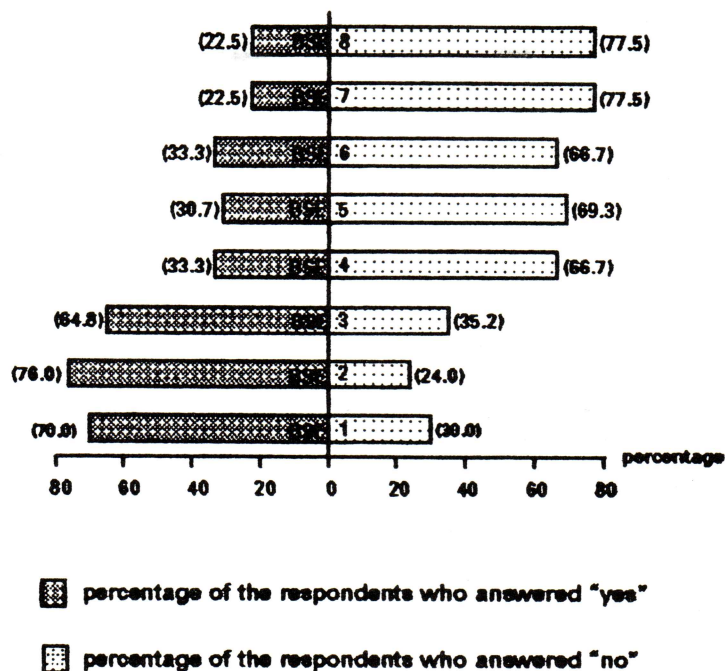


Fig. 1. Knowledge and performance of breast self-examination (n = 267).

### Knowledge and performance of BSE

According to the knowledge of BSE, 76 percent knew that BSE was the method available for early detection of breast tumour. Seventy percent knew that they could find any changes or lumps through BSE. Nearly sixty-five percent (64.8%) stated that every women needed to perform BSE once a month. Not more than 33.3 percent knew the best time to perform, as well as, 30.7 percent knew that postmenopausal or post hysterectomy women should examine their breasts on the same day each month.

Regarding to BSE performance, only 33.3 percent had reported performing routine monthly BSE. Twenty-five percent had found a lump while practising and had confirmed by their physicians after the findings.

### Discussion

The data indicated that two-third of the respondents knew the advantage and the

importance of BSE, and one-third knew the best time to perform. On the contrary to BSE performance, only one-third stated practising BSE once a month regularly. This revealed that BSE was not yet practised by the majority likewise the study of Bhakta.<sup>(5)</sup> Furthermore from the study, the women who had previous breast operation, especially mastectomy, reported more knowledge and awareness of doing BSE as well as the women with higher education and those working for the government. This may be due to the fact that women in these groups had opportunities to get more informations and some had direct experience of critical times in their life before.

At the time of this study, many of respondents said that they were embarrassed to touch their own breasts and anxious to feel in case they should find some abnormalities. This may lead to have less practice.

To ensure more BSE practice, women should have adequate education for understand-

ing their breasts and feel any changes that may occur.<sup>(6,7)</sup> Nurse and the health team should give necessary informations and encourage the women to do BSE effectively. BSE instruction dealing with technique of how and when to perform could increase more regularly BSE practice. The women should have actively involved in the learning experience while teaching. They need to examine their breasts at that time. In addition, the attractive easy reading and simple step to follow pamphlets, video tape and breast models are required to reinforce effective learning. It is the responsibility of the health team in promoting this inexpensive educational strategy by integrating into normal life pattern of the women. It is available and suitable for the self-care of all women in such uncertained economic status in Thailand.

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