BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH 2026

"Every story is unique, every journey matters,"

PAKISTAN ATOMIC ENERGY BREAST CANCER AWARENESS CAMPAIGN 2026

IAEA Anchor Centre-Rays of Hope Atomic Energy Cancer Hospital NORI Islamabad "Turning the tide" and "Making strides against Breast Cancer"



DR HUMERA MAHMOOD
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Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission through its 21 cancer hospitals spread all over the country is playing a remarkable role in creating cancer awareness besides providing diagnostic and treatment services to ailing brethren. AECH NORI (Nuclear Medicine, Oncology & Radiotherapy Institute) Islamabad is the flagship hospital of the commission, situated in the heart of Islamabad since 1983 and serving a population of more than 18 million from not only the twin cities but also upper Punjab, KPK, FATA, AJK, Gilgit Baltistan as well as Afghanistan and Middle east. The hospital has grown into the most modern hospital with state-of-the art diagnostic and non-surgical treatment modalities for cancer patients present under one roof.

NORI is now equipped with cutting edge technology including cyberknife, MR based hybrid brachytherapy and PET CT, theranostics besides highly advanced linear accelerators, SPECT CT cameras, CT scanner, MRI, contrast enhanced digital mammography with tomosynthesis and guided biopsies including stereotactic biopsies. Workload of the hospital is persistently rising and has reached nearly 11,000 new cancer patients and almost 70,000 follow up patients in 2025 in the department of Oncology. The same goes for the number of procedures in Diagnostic Radiology, Nuclear Medicine, Pathology, Hematology and Histopathology departments. This is attributed to not only the true rise in cancer incidence, but also improvement in the level of cancer awareness, patients' access to better diagnostic and treatment services and strong confidence of referring doctors on the services of the hospital.

NORI cancer hospital alongwith all the hospitals of PAEC is playing a vital role in creating cancer awareness and alleviating myths and misconceptions about the disease. The role of the hospital in spreading awareness about the menace of cancer using different means including brochures, posters, print and electronic media, awareness lectures and webinars for schools, colleges, universities and other forums, cancer awareness walks, involvement of cancer survivors, NORI Patients' Support Group is commendable. In fact, NORI is the first hospital in Pakistan to have launched patients' support group some 15 years ago for helping patients in their fight against cancer.

Besides remarkable patient services and infrastructure, AECH NORI has strong research, training and education program. The doctors, Medical Physicists and technologists trained at NORI are serving not only in Pakistan but abroad as well. NORI has very strong national and international academic and research collaboration in the fields of Radiation Oncology, Nuclear Medicine, Diagnostic Radiology, Hematology, Histopathology and molecular biology. The hospital is playing a vital role in training of doctors, scientists, nurses and technologists from Pakistan and abroad as well.

Considering the matchless services of NORI, the hospital was designated as **IAEA Anchor Centre under "RAYS of Hope" initiative of IAEA** (International Atomic Energy Agency). As IAEA anchor centre, the hospital has brought laurels to PAEC and Pakistan as it's the leading hospital amongst the five initially declared anchor centres the world over. As an IAEA anchor center, the hospital is contributing to the three pillars of "Rays of Hope" initiative i.e. education and training, research and quality control and assurance.

One of the factors contributing to NORI's recognition on the world map is its strong cancer awareness campaign. The hospital is "No smoking zone" since 2016 as one third of the cancers are caused by smoking.



AECH NORI hosts several cancer awareness activities throughout the year including World Cancer Day on 4th February, World No Tobacco Day on 31st May, World Head and Neck Cancer Day in July and World Gynecological Cancers Day besides various activities in the month of October.

Though cancer can affect any part of the body from head to toe, we talk more about breast cancer and the entire month of October is dedicated to breast cancer awareness. It's not only because breast cancer is the commonest cancer but also because it's one of the preventable, treatable and curable cancers and because our females are mainly affected by this menace and women as mothers, sisters, daughters and wives play central roles in their families.

It's worth mentioning here that generally most of the cancers including breast cancer are detected in advanced stages in Pakistan as compared to the developing world. If we talk of breast cancer, more than 80% of the patients are diagnosed in the early stage in western world.

In the Oncology department NORI, we used to see up to 25% of breast cancer patients in early stage about two decades ago. Recently this percentage has improved to more than 46%. This is of course a great achievement thanks to Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission and NORI Breast Cancer Awareness Campaign.

What is Breast Cancer Awareness Month?

Breast Cancer Awareness Month is an international health campaign that's held every October. The month aims to promote screening and reduce the risk of the disease, which affects 2.4 million women worldwide. Known best for its pink theme color, the month features a number of campaigns and programs designed to:

· support people diagnosed with breast cancer, including those with metastatic breast cancer
· educate people about breast cancer risk factors
· motivate people to learn about their risk of breast cancer
· encourage people to go for regular breast cancer screening

In the month of October, there are also specific dates designed to raise awareness of specific groups within the breast cancer community.

The main aim of Breast Cancer Awareness Campaign is to disseminate information about the facts associated with the disease, the possible risk factors leading to breast cancer, early detection by secondary prevention(screening) and timely treatment.

The official World Health Organization (WHO) theme for Breast Cancer Awareness Month 2026 is "Every story is unique, every journey matters".

Key Details of the Theme

·Individual Experience: The message highlights that no two breast cancer diagnoses, treatment paths, or emotional journeys are alike.

·Dignity and Equity: It emphasizes that every person affected deserves dignity, support, and access to timely, quality care regardless of location or background.

·Core Focus: The annual campaign continues to stress early detection, public education, and support for patients living with early-stage or metastatic breast cancer.

NORI keeping up its momentum, has been organizing several activities to commemorate PINKTOBER 2026. Entire building is illuminated pink and posters are displayed in every nook and corner, brochures are distributed, daily awareness lectures arranged for outpatients and their relatives, dedicated reception desk for women is there, free breast care clinic under supervision of qualified doctors is being run, throughout the month.

Dedicated sessions are being arranged for male audience to aware them of male breast cancer which is less than 1% and to teach them how they can support and help their female family members in seeking oncological diagnosis and treatment so that the patients can defeat the disease.

Different risk factors involved are hereditary, increasing age, lack of physical activity, obesity, intake of fatty foods and less intake of fruits and vegetables, smoking and alcohol, diabetes, increased estrogen exposure due to lack of breast feeding, early menarche, late menopause, no or late childbirth, hormone replacement therapy and unprescribed use of hormones. Genetic mutation and age are not avoidable, but other risk factors are modifiable.

Early detection of breast cancer is possible by seeking early medical attention in case of any swelling, color change, non-healing ulcer, retraction of nipple and blood-stained discharge. Another recommended way is screening using monthly breast self-examinations after the age of 20, annual clinical breast examination and mammography (specialized breast x-rays) after the age of 40 (after the age of 35 in case of positive family history). There are several myths about breast cancer that need to be alleviated.

MYTHS & FACTS ABOUT BREAST CANCER

Myth: Breast cancer is largely genetic
Fact: 10-15% of breast cancers are hereditary
Myth: Small breast women have a lower risk
Fact: The risk of breast cancer doesn't depend on size
Myth: Breast cancer always appears as a lump
Fact: There can be other symptoms depending on the extent of the disease
Myth: Mammograms cause breast cancer
Fact: The radiation exposure with annual mammogram is less than the ultraviolet radiation received in a year. Moreover, low energy X-rays are used for mammography
Myth: Young women don't get breast cancer
Fact: Breast cancer doesn't follow age. It can occur in any age group though risk increases with increasing age. The commonest age affected in Pakistan is between 40 and 50 years.
Myth: Deodorants and antiperspirants cause breast cancer
Fact: Not scientifically proven
Myth: Wearing black garments increases your cancer risk
Fact: Not scientifically proven
Myth: I had a normal mammogram, so I don't need to worry about breast cancer
Fact: Mammograms have to be repeated annually between 40-70 years in Pakistan and after 70, the frequency of mammograms will depend on individual risk factors.
Myth: Men don't get breast cancer
Fact: Men can also be affected with breast cancer though percentage of male breast cancer is less than 1%. Presentation, risk factors, staging and treatment are the same as for female breast cancer.

NPWS
Nori Patients Welfare Society
AECH-NORI

"Verily! Allah is with those who do good deeds" (Al Quran 29:69)

NORI Patients Welfare Society (NPWS) a non-profit organization working under the banner of AtomicEnergy Cancer Hospital NORI is providing services to ailing humanity since 2008. The society is registered with the Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy (PCP) and under the ICT Charities Act 2021.

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to help, support and cherish cancer patients and make a difference in the fight against cancer.

FREE MEDICINE FOR POOR PATIENTS
FREE FOOD FOR PATIENTS & THEIR ATTENDANTS
UP GRADATION OF HOSPITAL & STRENGTHENING MANPOWER
CANCER AWARENESS PROGRAMS
MUSAFIR KHANA FOR PATIENTS & ATTENDANTS COMING FROM FAR-FLUNG AREAS
PHARMACY PROVIDES MEDICINES TO ALL REGISTERED PATIENTS AT SUBSIDIZED RATES

NPWS has enhance the facilitation of visitors with the inclusion of a new block that include State of the art Auditorium, Pharmacy, Reception, and Cafeteria



Glimpse of Breast Cancer Awareness & World Cancer Day Programs organized by NPWS



NPWS provides free breakfast, lunch, tea, and dinner to patients and their attendants.



MusafirKhana for facilitating patients and attendants coming from farflung areas



Save Precious lives of poor cancer patients

Give Donation, Save Life

Your donations can save lives of thousands of patients dying of cancer due to non availability of resources.

For Donations:
Account Title: Nori Patients Welfare society (NPWS) NORI Hospital Islamabad
Account Number: 1770100012679
Bank and Branch: Askari Bank, G-8 Markaz Branch, Islamabad
Ph: 051-2833926, 051-9260611 Fax: 051-9260616

BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH 2026

"Every story is unique, every journey matters,"

Behind every number is a journey:NORI's fight against breast cancer

Growing awareness is bringing more women to screening and helping detect breast cancer earlier at NORI

Dr. Zoya Ahmed
Oncologist AECH NORI

Behind every breast cancer statistic is a woman's journey: the moment she notices a lump, the decision to seek help, the treatment she undergoes, and, for many, the day she completes that journey as a survivor.

At the Atomic Energy Cancer Hospital, Nuclear Medicine, Oncology and Radiotherapy Institute (AECH-NORI), the rising numbers tell a story of both challenge and hope. More women are coming forward for breast screening, and more cancers are being detected at earlier, more treatable stages-signs that awareness campaigns are beginning to make a difference.

Between January 2021 and June 2026, NORI registered 7,513 new breast cancer patients, including 7,428 women and 85 men. While breast cancer is far more common among women, doctors stress that men can develop it too and should not ignore warning signs.

In 2025 alone, the hospital treated 1,360 breast cancer patients. Of these, 891(roughly two-third)have completed treatment and are now on follow-up, while 469 remain on their treatment journey as "cancer warriors." Their experiences underline the importance of early detection and timely treatment.

More women are being screened but late presentation is still a challenge

NORI's breast screening service examined a total of 2477 women from 2024-2026.757 women in 2024 and 842 in 2025, an increase of about 11 percent. By the time data for this report was compiled, another 878 women had been screened in 2026, although the year is not yet over.

The stage at which women are being diagnosed is also improving. In 2021, 32.5 percent of breast cancer patients presented at Stage I or II. That proportion rose to 34.4 percent in 2022, 38.3 percent in 2023 and 39.7 percent in 2024, reaching 46 percent in 2025.

Over the same period, the share of patients arriving at Stage III or IV fell from 67.5 percent to 53.9 percent. Despite this progress, many women still present with advanced disease, underscoring the need for awareness efforts to continue and expand.

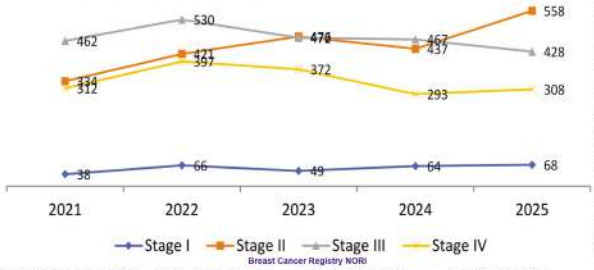
We at NORI,believe this steady improvement is linked to growing awareness, self-examination and earlier screening.

Breast screening must begin earlier

Age related data further underline the need for earlier awareness and screening. Of the 1,360 patients registered in 2025, 400 were in their forties, 381 in their fifties, 173 in their thirties and 20 in their twenties.

Nearly 44 percent of patients were under 50. This highlights the need for women,particularly those with a family history of breast or other cancersto be aware of warning signs well before middle age and to seek timely medical advice.

A growing global and national burden



The importance of sustained awareness campaigns is reflected in global and national figures. GLOBOCAN 2024 estimated more than 2.4 million new breast cancer cases worldwide, making breast cancer the most common cancer among women in 164 of 186 countries.

Breast cancer is also the most frequently diagnosed cancer among Pakistani women. The PAEC Cancer Registry shows its share of all cancers in women rising from 39.5 percent in 2015-2017 to 42.2 percent in 2020-21. Studies and registry data suggest that roughly one in eight Pakistani women may develop breast cancer during her lifetime, underlining the scale of the challenge.

The risk is growing-but so, encouragingly, is the number of women who know what to look for and when to seek help.

A shared responsibility

Breast screening services are available at NORI all year round through a dedicated breast cancer clinic. Women are assessed by a female oncologist,with mammography performed by a female technologist and sonomammography by a female radiologist,ensuring a comfortable screening experience.

During Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October, NORI's campaigns urged women to know their bodies, report any lump or change without delay, and undergo screening when advised.

NORI's breast cancer awareness campaign comprised seminars, academic lectures, and separate awareness sessions for male and female patients and their attendants. These activities aimed to encourage women to recognize early warning signs, seek timely screening and treatment, while also involving families and male relatives in supporting women's access to care.

NORI uses simple and practical communication tools of health education to make breast cancer information accessible to general public.These include brochures and as easy to understand video on breast self-examination.By using simple and practical communication tools, Through continued community engagement, NORI hopes to reduce late presentation and help more women begin their cancer journey early enough to win it.

Breast cancer awareness is not the responsibility of health professionals alone.Families,communit y leaders and the media all have a role to play in encouraging women to prioritise their health.

The message is simple: the earlier a woman reaches a doctor, the shorter and easier her battle becomes,and the greater is her chanceof winning it.

Sources: GLOBOCAN 2024, PAEC Cancer Registry2017-2019,2020-2021, AECH-NORI electronic patient records.

