

# Health and Wellbeing Event

Raising awareness of Breast Cancer for South Asians

Held on the 9<sup>th</sup> of October

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## About Us

Healthwatch Swindon is your local health and social care champion. As an independent statutory body, we have the power to make sure NHS leaders and other decision-makers listen to local feedback and improve standards of care. We also help people to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.

## The Event

Changing Suits founders Bal & Taj hosted their first Health and Wellbeing Event. The event was in collaboration with Anushka Chaudhry Consultant Oncoplastic and Cosmetic Breast Surgeon, to Raise Awareness of Breast Cancer within the South Asian community.

Changing Suits is a non-profit organisation addressing the inequalities and cultural barriers for the South Asian community in Swindon. It was set up by two sisters Bal and Taj from the Sikh community.

### Purpose of Changing Suits

- Raising Awareness of South Asian Culture within communities
- Not-for-profit organisations work with individuals and local services to break through cultural barriers.
- Cultural barriers such as gender inequalities, living with in-laws, domestic violence, and medical conditions.

It was held at the Punjabi Community Centre on Cricklade Road, SN2 7BB, to raise **awareness of breast cancer within the South Asian community**. The Great Western Hospital supported the event alongside third sector Voluntary organisations.

The event took place during Breast Cancer Awareness month to encourage the South Asian community to attend mammogram appointments and seek medical advice if they are concerned, as a community who are often reluctant to do so.

The event was successful and attended by people from various communities, local service providers and businesses, and local representatives. Mayor Cllr Abdul Amin was also in attendance and showed great support for the event and the organisation.

Nurses were available at the event to help members of the public book mammogram appointments. Presentations were given by well-being professionals, including exercise and nutritional experts.

The family-friendly event also included a bouncy castle, face painting, henna and stalls from local businesses and services.

This event also aimed to raise awareness of the barriers to accessing healthcare for the South Asian community in Swindon, with huge differences in treatment, perception and access to healthcare for South Asian people.

This review showcases information and advice from various sources, including the local offer of Breast Cancer Support in Swindon.

## **Our Aim**

Healthwatch Swindon attended the event to show our support to the charity Changing Suits in raising awareness of breast cancer and also listen/talk to the South Asian community about their experiences of health and social care services in Swindon. We want to take this feedback directly to healthcare providers to make changes to their services.

The term "South Asian" in this report refers to anyone of Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani or Sri Lankan origin.

Whilst each of these communities has its own different cultures and beliefs, they are all at a higher risk compared to other ethnic minorities with certain medical conditions.

# Breast Cancer

## Overview

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in the UK and the most common cancer in women in the UK, according to [Cancer Research UK](#).

October is Breast cancer awareness month, this annual campaign highlights the importance of breast cancer awareness, education and research.

Breast cancer can affect anyone and is one of the most common types of cancer in the UK but when detected in the early stages there is a good chance of recovery.

Possible signs and symptoms of breast cancer can include: [Breast cancer in women - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

- A new lump or area of thickened tissue in either breast that was not there before
- A change in the size or shape of one or both breasts
- A discharge of fluid from either of your nipples
- A lump or swelling in either of your armpits
- A change in the look or feel of your skin, such as puckering or dimpling, a rash or redness
- A rash (like eczema), crusting, scaly or itchy skin or redness on or around your nipple
- A change in the appearance of your nipple, such as becoming sunken into your breast

Breast pain is not usually a symptom of breast cancer.

## Causes of Breast Cancer

The exact causes of breast cancer are not fully understood, making it difficult to say why one woman may develop breast cancer and another may not.

These may include:

- Age - the risk increases as you get older
- A family history of breast cancer
- A previous non-cancerous (benign) breast lump
- Being tall, overweight or obese
- Drinking alcohol

Find out more about the [causes of breast cancer](#)

## Raising awareness of breast cancer in Asian women

Breast cancer awareness is important for many reasons, it helps to better understand the disease. In addition, it can also help promote early detection and treatment.

According to [Cancer Research UK](#), incidences of breast cancer are rising faster in South Asian women than in other ethnic groups in the UK

New research shows that women of South Asian and black ethnicity, as women under 40 are least likely to check their breasts for signs of cancer or seek help until the later stages of breast cancer. Studies carried out in the UK have found that South Asian and black women who have never checked themselves for signs of breast cancer haven't done so because they feel there is a stigma within their community around acknowledging or speaking of the subject.

South Asian women (compared to white women) are: –

- Less likely to attend breast screening
- Present late for diagnosis
- Have lower breast cancer awareness
- Lower knowledge of symptoms and risk factors
- Report higher levels of depression, anxiety and poorer quality of life

Breast cancer Consultant Oncoplastic and Cosmetic Breast Surgeon Anushka Chaudhry from the Ridgeway Hospital discussed the importance of raising awareness at the event. Breaking down the stigma and the need to openly talk about the subject within our own family's "mother-to-daughter conversations" and within our South Asian communities in Swindon. She showcased a presentation on the signs of cancer and how to routinely check and what to do if you suspect breast cancer. Wiltshire Breast Screening service was also present at the event ready to give advice and to book people in for a breast Screening appointment-mammogram if wanted. The team was also ready to give private demonstrations on how to check your breasts correctly and had available information in different language formats to hand out on the day as well.

Some women do not come forward in time due to the fear of how they will be treated within not only their immediate family but also within the communities with some women fearing that it may impact their daughters finding suitable husbands.

It was mentioned by healthcare professionals they had seen cases where cancer had been detected and was treatable, but treatment was refused, with the patient refusing and saying it was God's will.

## What people told us

Healthwatch Manager Amritpal Kaur asked women attending the event about their experience of breast cancer within their own families and communities. We also spoke to people about their experiences and feedback on health and social care services in Swindon and this is what they told us: -

### Breast Cancer feedback from south Asian women

"My mother never told me or talked openly about breast cancer with me "

"It's a topic which never came up in conversation, it was only when I received a letter alerting me to book a screening appointment."

"I was told to check my breasts regularly by my daughter who is a GP "

"This is the first event I have attended about Breast cancer, there needs to be more information and events like this highlighting the importance of regularly checking within Asian communities "

"Doctors should be actively highlighting the need to check your breasts routinely and how to check them correctly and what to look for "

"As South Asians, we are uncomfortable having conversations about breast cancer awareness because we rarely share our fears and vulnerabilities."

"We need to openly discuss topics like this without the fear of any negativity "

"All Girls should be educated and given information on how to correctly check their breasts and signs of breast cancer at Schools so it is embedded into them from an early age the importance of checking their breasts when older "

“We should also tackle the taboo of fathers being able to openly discuss topics like this with their wives and daughters, it should be both women and men raising the importance of certain medical conditions which we are more prone to being Asian”

“In India, my family never talked about breast cancer, it was only when I moved to England that I was made aware of the condition”

“My mother has never had a breast cancer screening and she is 73 years old ”

“We need more events like this giving Asian woman more confidence to openly talk about breast cancer and screening ”

“The rates of breast cancer are increasing within the South Asian community, but with fewer people going to get diagnosed and treated, outcomes are becoming increasingly worrying.”

**Taj from Changing Suits**

## Feedback about health and social care services

“Struggle to get through to my GP practice on the phone to speak to the receptionist”

“Receptionists do not have enough patience to listen when trying to communicate my health complaints.”

“Need to allocate more time for appointments when there is a known language barrier to give enough time to communicate my health worries, my GP practice knows I struggle with the English language.”

“Receptionist did not help in the end I attended the A& E department at the Great Western hospital as I didn't want to go back to my GP practice”

“I feel like we do get treated and spoken to differently being Asian ”

“All health care services need to have information available to hand out in different languages which aren't always available ”



“Healthcare providers should reach out more and do more events like this raising the awareness of health topics which we are more prone to getting being from Asian backgrounds “

“I have to attend every appointment with my parents to see the doctor as the practice is not catering for them in terms of helping with translation. “

“Struggled to get a face-to-face appointment with my GP for several weeks now “

“I do not like telephone appointments, I struggle to tell my doctor what is wrong without physically showing them which is easier when you struggle to speak English.”

## Personal Story

### My Experience of suffering from Cancer as an Ethnic Minority person



“I felt very alone, abandoned because there was no support”

I had my yearly mammogram and this was clear so no worries. I was well and going about my everyday routine.

Then I started to notice a dent/hole in the area of my L breast. My daughter is a GP and, on her Sunday visit, I asked her to have a look as I was not happy with this dent/hole. She looked and felt the area and then advised me to see my GP ASAP. I was referred to a Breast Centre, and before going to see the consultant, I had another mammogram. Again, this was clear after his examination, he requested an urgent Ultrasound scan and biopsy.

I was shocked to hear the Radiologist and another member of staff discussing the findings over me. They did not know whom I was and should not have

discussed anything in my presence. As an ex-nurse, I understood everything they were talking about. I became very upset as I already knew that what I have is very serious. Two biopsies were taken and the second one was very painful. The member of staff tried to divert my attention. She asked me questions about how many children I had. I answered 3 then added that if it was not for my daughter, I would be still sitting at home with this. She asked ... Is your daughter a nurse? It felt like because you are Asian you can only be Nurses or cleaners.

My consultant was in and out of the radiologist's room, which made me feel it is more serious than I thought. I joined my husband in the waiting room, crying with him. Previously he waited for me in the waiting room so I asked him to come with me for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time when seeing the consultant. We were shocked when all the conversation was on Cancer. I was to have an appointment urgently for the result of the Biopsies. Then I became upset and stopped listening. The consultant then asked me about my daughter as he has heard she is a GP. For my next appointment, I had both of my daughters and my husband with me for support. It was confirmed I had grade 3 Cancer and needed to go through Surgery, Chemotherapy and Radio Therapy



Nasma Ramruttun

## Conclusion

It is clear from attending the event that more needs to be done in raising awareness within the South Asian communities, about not only breast cancer but other medical conditions that coming from Asian backgrounds we are more prone to.

The event highlighted that people from South Asian communities need more support when it comes to raising the importance of checking for certain medical conditions. This is mainly due to a lack of information they are exposed to or given by health care professionals and health and social care services in Swindon.

There is still a lot to be done within the South Asian communities in tackling taboo subjects like this and breaking down the stigma of being able to discuss breast cancer without feeling that they will be faced with negativity.

Healthcare providers need to address the language in which they use to communicate with people from Asian backgrounds and do more outreach work into these communities highlighting medical conditions and what information/support is available to them including the local offer in Swindon.

Changing Suits is a needed charity within Swindon supporting the South Asian communities in tackling not only health inequalities but inequalities on the whole. The event was a success in reaching out and raising awareness of breast cancer highlighting the importance of having charities like this in Swindon representing the Asian communities in breaking down barriers.

We will continue to support Changing suits in addressing Health inequalities in Swindon and look forward to working with them on future events with the South Asian communities in Swindon and surrounding areas.

## Local Offer and National Support/Information



### Ridgeway Breast Care Support Group

Is a support group that provides support and practical help to anyone affected by breast cancer. The group holds events such as coffee mornings, pamper days and evening meetings with guest speakers who cover a wide range of topics and include medical updates, complementary therapies and lifestyle advice. Meetings are a mixture of online and in-person, for more information and dates and times, please visit the website.

[www.ridgewaybreastcaresupportgroup.org.uk](http://www.ridgewaybreastcaresupportgroup.org.uk)

[Asian Women Cancer Group – We are Here to Support You...](#)

[Breast Cancer Now | The research and care charity](#)

[Contact – Breast Cancer Support](#)

[Breast cancer | Macmillan Cancer Support](#)

[Breast Cancer Support Groups: How to Find One and More \(healthline.com\)](#)

[Breast Centre | Great Western Hospital \(gwh.nhs.uk\)](#)



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