

## BREAST CANCER DIAGNOSTIC METHODS: SCREEN-DETECTED AND CLINICAL CASES. AN ITALIAN SURVEY OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES

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**Aims and background:** The real practice of breast cancer diagnosis and treatment is often very different from guideline recommendations. Screening programs should minimize deviations from "best practice".

The aim of the study was to compare cases detected by screening programs with cases that were not part of the public screening program, analyzing the diagnostic pathways from the first suspected breast problem to therapeutic intervention for breast cancer.

**Methods:** We interviewed a random sample of 268 women aged 49-70 years in three Italian regions (Lazio, Tuscany, Basilicata) who were treated for breast cancer, stratified by screening participation.

**Results:** In the nonscreened group, 48% of women were symptomatic and 50% were diagnosed by preventive tests. The proportion of women treated within 30 days of diagnosis was significantly lower in the screened group, 21.3% vs 35.8% ( $P = 0.0003$ ). The mean number of tests (mammography, ultrasonography, cytology and histology) performed in the screened group was significantly higher than in the nonscreened group, 3.7 vs 2.8 ( $P = 0.001$ ). The percentage of women treated without a preoperative histological or cytological diagnosis was lower in the screened group than in the nonscreened group, 14% vs 25% ( $P = 0.024$ ).

**Conclusion:** Participation in screening programs seems to lead to more appropriate disease management even for breast cancer cases treated at the same hospital.

**Key words:** breast cancer, disease management, mammography, screening.

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