

## FIBROCYSTIC BREAST VERSUS BREAST CANCER

Every year during the month of October, men and women like myself are reminded of the importance of healthy breasts that are cancer-free. We are also given basic knowledge about breast cancer, how it is formed, how to recognize the signs and symptoms, and how to increase awareness of the lifestyle that can increase or lower the risks of getting breast cancer.

According to the American Cancer Society (ACS), breast cancer is the second cause of cancer death among women in the United States. Cancer starts when cells in the breast begin to grow out of control. It is the out of control growth of the cells that creates a mass of tissue called tumor. The growth or tumor can be normal or benign. If the rapid growing cells are abnormal, the tumor is malignant or cancerous. The malignant cells can invade surrounding tissues and spread

(metastasize) to other areas of the body. Women are more prone to have cancer than men, but they get it too. The cancer starts from different parts of the breast. For example, in ducts carrying milk to the nipples. This type of breast cancer is called ductal cancer. When it occurs in the glands producing breast milk, it is called lobular cancer (ACS, 2017).

As we learn about breast cancer, it is also important to know about another disease of the breast: fibrocystic breast disease, commonly known as fibrocystic breast. It is a nonmalignant, non-cancerous condition, in which the breasts feel lumpy. It is due to hormonal changes made by the ovaries. The symptoms are more severe around the time of menstruation and can last the whole month. Any woman between the ages of 20 and 50 can have fibrocystic breast disease. Although fibrocystic breast disease is not harmful, the signs

and symptoms can be very alarming and make the detection for breast cancer very challenging.

Here are some signs and symptoms of breast cancer versus fibrocystic breast disease:

### **BREAST CANCER WARNING SIGNS**

- Swelling on a part of the breast or underarm
- A previously protruding nipple that becomes inverted
- A persistent rash at the nipple or areola
- Bloodstained discharge from the nipple, and
- A change in the size or shape of the breast

### **FIBROCYSTIC BREAST DISEASE SYMPTOMS**

- Feeling of heaviness in your breast
- Tenderness or discomfort around your breast and potentially up into your armpit
- Changes to the texture of your breasts or the skin around the breast