FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Should we continue screening for breast cancer?
Yes! Says Breast Cancer Awareness Month (BCAM) 2011

SINGAPORE, 27 September 2011 – “Treasure the Breast Things in Life” is the theme for BCAM 2011. “Screening for breast cancer still remains the most effective way of reducing morbidity and mortality from breast cancer, along with effective treatment” says Dr Lim Siew Eng from the National University Cancer Institute, Singapore who is the Chairperson of the BCAM Organising Committee this year. More than a year has passed since the media coverage of a publication in a prominent medical journal discounting a substantial benefit of screening mammograms in lowering breast cancer mortality. However there are multiple organisations including the World Health Organization (WHO) which estimate that mammograms reduce the breast cancer death rate by 25 percent in women over 50. Other groups put the figure at 15 to 23 percent.

Breast cancer is the most frequently diagnosed cancer in women in Singapore. In Western developed nations where screening programmes have been in operation for much longer periods than in Singapore, there have been real decreases in breast cancer mortality, that have been attributed to screening and improvements in treatments.

The BCAM committee would like to send a message that early detection of breast cancer can save lives. There is some concern that some groups of the public may be confused by the benefit of screening mammograms.

In 2007, 61% of Singaporean women in our target age-group for breast cancer screening went for at least one mammogram, an increase of 27% from 1998. The challenge ahead of us is to ensure that women make it a habit to screen for breast cancer regularly. Our long-term target is for at least 70% of Singaporean women aged 50 and above to go for regular screening, up from the current 41%. 'It would be regrettable if progress made in breast cancer screening became stagnant or is reversed. Efforts to educate the public about breast cancer must be maintained and even increased in some groups,' said Dr Lim Siew Eng.

There are ongoing efforts to ascertain how we can improve screening as well as ways to deal with the barriers to screening mammograms. Dr Lim Siew Eng has said that the barriers could be financial, cultural, and lack of awareness of the illness. Some may resist because of cost, and some people prefer not to know or be screened for breast cancer. Some are frightened by the test – the pain, the anxiety of an abnormal result, and psychological distress. “There may be some discomfort from the procedure, but it is not overbearingly so. Strong evidence supports the fact
that regular mammography is an important part of a woman's preventive health care. We advise women to put it on your list of things to do. The earlier the diagnosis, the better the outcome and the procedure takes only 10 to 15 minutes."

Some women would prefer to do self breast examination as a substitute for screening mammograms. However, self breast examinations have not been shown to improve outcomes as it cannot pick up small sized breast cancers. But that does not mean that women should not examine themselves. In fact, they may extend their lives by bringing worrisome breast findings to medical attention. We encourage women to be breast aware.

To further encourage screening, Singapore Cancer Society will be subsidizing $20 for every eligible woman who undergoes breast screening at the participating clinics/X-Ray centres for mammogram booked within the month of October 2011. Mammogram screening must be done by 31 December 2011; the activity is supported by the BCAM committee and other partners. The Ministry of Health has also recognised the problem of breast cancer and has pledged to keep screening mammograms affordable. From 1 July 2011, women going for screening mammograms can use their Medisave to reduce the out-of-pocket cost of the test. The recommendation is for women aged 50 and older to go for mammograms once every two years. The BCAM Organising Committee would also like to stress that 'Once is never enough, it is important to go for mammograms regularly.'

BCAM will be launched with the Pink Ribbon Walk, a signature event organised by Breast Cancer Foundation, on 1 October at the Waterfront Promenade at Marina Bay. There will also be many other fun-filled educational and survivorship events during the month to address our public, our women and our survivors. As BCAM moves forward we would like to remind the public that mammography remains our best tool in screening for breast cancer. We hope that as technologies improve, screening mammograms will be even more effective.

-Ends-
The BCAM Organising Committee includes:

1. National University Cancer Institute, Singapore (NCIS)
2. Breast Cancer Foundation (BCF)
3. Singapore Cancer Society (SCS)
4. National Cancer Centre, Singapore (NCCS)

Supported By:

1. Health Promotion Board (HPB)

Enclosed:

Appendix I – BCAM Calendar of Events & Activities

Appendix II – Patient Testimonies

BreastScreen Singapore

Approximately 1,400 women are diagnosed with breast cancer in Singapore every year, making it the most common cancer among women in Singapore. Its incidence is highest among women aged 55 to 59. Despite its prevalence, only 41 per cent of women aged between 50 and 69 years reported going for a mammogram in the past two years.

BreastScreen Singapore is a national breast cancer screening programme, which encourages women aged 50 years and older to go for regular screening mammography. Through this programme, a screening mammogram is provided to them at a subsidised rate of $50 for Singaporeans and $75 for Permanent Residents.

For more details, visit the HPB website: www.hpb.gov.sg/healthscreening
About National University Cancer Institute, Singapore (www.ncis.com.sg)
The National University Cancer Institute, Singapore (NCIS) offers a broad spectrum of cancer care and management covering both paediatric and adult cancers, with expertise in prevention, screening, diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care. The Institute's strength lies in the multidisciplinary approach taken to develop a comprehensive and personalised plan for each cancer patient and his or her family. With several award-winning clinician-scientists and clinician-investigators, NCIS has an international reputation in translational research and clinical trials, providing patients with access to promising breakthroughs in cancer diagnostics, technology and therapies. NCIS is also closely affiliated with the Cancer Science Institute of Singapore, National University of Singapore.

About Breast Cancer Foundation (www.bcf.org.sg)
Breast Cancer Foundation (BCF) is a non-profit organisation set up in 1997 with a mission: To Eradicate Breast Cancer as a Life-threatening Disease. Early detection and treatment of breast cancer is likely to carry a better prognosis and increases the chance of survival before the disease becomes life threatening. For this reason, BCF has been playing a strategic role to educate and empower women with the tools for early detection. Knowing the facts and symptoms associated with the condition, regular breast self-examinations and going for regular mammogram screening are the steps women can take to be in control of their breast health. Our Support Programmes are designed to provide emotional support for patients as they undergo treatments, inspire survivors to regain their confidence and engage affected family members to help their loved ones enhance their quality of life.

About The National Cancer Centre Singapore (www.nccs.com.sg)
The National Cancer Centre Singapore is the national comprehensive cancer centre dedicated to the multidisciplinary and holistic approach to cancer treatment and care for all its patients. As a hub for the best cancer professionals, patients can receive the best in treatment and care through the exceptional site-specific sub-specialisation of our oncology specialists. The Centre is also the institutional home for clinician scientists and researchers who are actively engaged in cutting-edge clinical and translational research. Our patients benefit from the close collaboration between our physicians and scientists working to discover the best in treatment options, besides the full range of support services such as palliative care and psychosocial counselling. NCCS also actively promotes anti-cancer advocacy through its wide range of community outreach and public education programmes. Today NCCS, which was established in 1997, sees most of the public sector oncology cases. Through its innovation and collaboration, NCCS is set to be a global leading cancer centre.

About Singapore Cancer Society (www.singaporecancersociety.org.sg)
Established in 1964, Singapore Cancer Society is a self-funded voluntary welfare organization which provides patient care services to needy cancer patients through its welfare, hospice home care, cancer treatment subsidy and rehabilitation support programmes. In addition, the Society also provides free cancer screening services and promotes cancer awareness and prevention through its public education and community outreach programmes.
About Health Promotion Board (www.hpb.gov.sg)
The Health Promotion Board (HPB) was established as a statutory board in 2001 with the vision of building “A Nation of Healthy People”. HPB aims to empower the people of Singapore to attain optimal health, increase the quality and years of healthy life and prevent illness, disability and premature death. As the key driver of national health promotion and disease prevention programmes, HPB spearheads health education, promotion and prevention programmes as well as creates a health-supportive environment in Singapore. It develops and organises relevant health promotion and disease prevention programmes, reaching out to the healthy, the at-risk and the unhealthy at all stages of life – children, youths, adults and older Singapore residents. Its health promotion programmes include nutrition, mental health, physical activity, smoking control and communicable disease education. HPB also promotes healthy ageing, integrated health screening, and chronic disease education and management.

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