

BREAST COURSE 4 NURSES

The Breast Course for Nurses (BCN) NPO was formed in 2014. Although small courses were run before 2014, becoming an NPO allowed the BCN to expand and it provided more training opportunities with larger numbers of healthcare workers (HCW). Although aimed at primary nurses working in low middle income countries (LMIC), the BCN is open to training any type of medical professional. To date, the BCN has trained over 700 HCW ranging from care workers through to doctors. Courses have been run throughout South Africa as well as Zimbabwe, Namibia and Malawi. The course has also been adapted and run in Guyana, South America on multiple occasions.

In most LMIC, there are no state financed breast cancer screening facilities and with the absence of regular mammography, clinical breast examination is crucial to downstage breast cancer at the time of diagnosis. In many places in Southern Africa, the first contact for women with breast complaints is with a nurse in a primary clinic. There is little formal breast training for nurses.

The BCN is aimed at equipping HCW with the knowledge required to manage patients with breast problems. A typical course consists of 2-3 days of training based on the Breast Care book by Dr Jenny Edge and Prof David Woods. The emphasis is on learning and not teaching. The BCN is not a credited course which means that it can be adapted to those being taught. Although core content remains the same, local specialists within area of the course are used to ensure that the material being shared is relevant to the area and those being taught.

Topics covered in the course include:

- The normal breast
- Clinical assessment of the breast
- Special investigations of the breast
- Benign changes of the breast
- Cancer of the breast
- Treatment of breast cancer and management of its side effects
- Palliative care
- Advocacy and support

There are a number of practical aspects covered in the course including biopsy techniques, lymphoedema bandaging, case studies and clinical breast examination.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought many challenges to the entire medical profession. The BCN NPO was no exception. After years of face-to-face courses, change was needed re the model of teaching. Although challenging, this came at a good time as the BCN saw the need for a higher-level education course on breast care.

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PBO number: 930050375
NPO number: 147-129



In 2019, the first ever Breast Care Course (BCC) was run through Stellenbosch University short course division. The course is designed for registered nurses only and although much of the content is the same as the BCN course, the level of detail is much more, and it is run over a period of 6 months. Students need to complete a portfolio of evidence, ongoing online quizzes throughout the duration of the course, a practical and theoretical exam and case studies. 10 registered nurses completed the 2019 course.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and various other hurdles, there was no course in 2020. This however allowed time to restructure certain parts of the course and to apply for funding. In 2021, the second course was commenced. This course was sponsored by Phakamisa (of Astra Zeneca) and had input from the National Department of Health (NDoH). The NDoH recruited the nurses from various provinces throughout South Africa. A total of 26 registered nurses from the Western Cape, Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape, Kwazulu Natal and the Northwest province attended the course. The course was completed in February 2022. At the time of this article, the final results of the students were not yet available.

The BCC commences with a 1-week theory week which covers the following topics:

- The normal breast
- Comprehensive history taking and clinical breast examination
- Benign changes of the breast
- Radiological investigations
- Cytology and histology
- Genetic referral
- Risk assessment and surveillance
- Cancer of the breast
- Chemotherapy, radiotherapy, surgery and endocrine therapy (including side effects)
- Metastatic screening
- Communication
- Palliative care
- Lymphoedema
- Psychosocial aspects of breast cancer
- Referral pathways

Practical aspects of the course during the theory week include:

- Clinical breast examination
- History taking
- Biopsy techniques
- Genetic assessments
- Palliative care case studies
- Lymphoedema bandaging and exercises
- Attendance of a breast MDT
- Practical exam

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Dr Jenny Edge (head of the breast and endocrine department at Tygerberg Hospital) co-wrote the BCC with Sr Lieske Wegelin (a registered nurse with a special interest in breast conditions). Sr Wegelin has been a part of the BCN NPO since it commenced in 2014. Sr Elna Sutherland completed the BCC in 2019 and joined the administrative and course co-ordination team for the 2021 course.

The 2021 BCC was a collaborative project. Involved parties and sponsors included the following:

BCN
Phakamisa (Astra Zeneca)
NDoH
Stellmed
Tygerberg hospital breast and endocrine department
Tygerberg training centre
Lecturers from both private and public facilities
Morton and Partners
Lancet Laboratories
BARD
Medical students

The BCN is involved in many other activities including a project with Rad-Aid International, online training through the NDoH, local collaborative screening programmes and many more!

To continue with any courses and programmes, ongoing sponsorship and funding is required. For further information, please contact Sr Lieske Wegelin (lieskewegelin@gmail.com), visit the Breast Course 4 Nurses website and follow the BCN Facebook page to stay up to date with current activities.



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Training in Guyana, South America



Breast education and screening project at Khayelitsha Hospital 2022

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Breast Care Course students 2019



Biopsy demonstration BCN Khayelitsha Hospital 2019

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Breast Care Course students 2022



**MySchool
MyVillage
MyPlanet**
EVERY SWIPE COUNTS

The BCN is a member of the MySchool Project

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