

NUS study: Lack of knowledge, fear of becoming burden among reasons Singapore women don't go for breast cancer screening



Associate Professor Mikael Hartman, NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health (right) and Professor Lee Chuen Neng, NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (left) presenting the book *Breast Cancer Meanings: Journeys Across Asia* to President Halimah Yacob at the fundraising gala dinner at ParkRoyal on Beach Road on March 16, 2018. ST PHOTO: JONATHAN CHOO

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Gracia Lee ✉

SINGAPORE - Researchers from the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health (SSHSPH) and Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (NUS Medicine) at the National University of Singapore (NUS) have embarked on a series of studies into the attitudes of Asian women towards breast cancer.

The findings from the first of those studies - a pilot qualitative study that looked into the low uptake of breast cancer screening and early treatment - was published in a book launched on Friday (March 16).

President Halimah Yacob, who is the NUS Chancellor, was the guest-of-honour at the launch of the book titled *Breast Cancer Meanings: Journeys Across Asia*.

The study identified four reasons women here were reluctant to seek screening or early treatment: A lack of knowledge about breast cancer occurrence, a lack of information on symptoms, misconceptions about its treatments, and fear of becoming a burden to their families.

Associate Professor Mikael Hartman, head of the Breast Cancer Prevention Programme at SSHSPH, said programmes and policies need to be developed to address the needs and concerns of Asian women.

"The successful implementation of breast cancer screening programmes and public health promotion policies have reduced breast cancer mortality in the West by half over the last decades. However, these strategies seem to gain little traction in Asia, and many Asian women are still dying from breast cancer largely due to later presentation of the disease," he said.

The researchers are now turning their attention to the the higher breast cancer mortality rates among Malay women. The study will be first conducted on the Malay population in Singapore, with the findings used to develop programmes to encourage screening and treatment for Malay women.