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HPB MARKS 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF BREAST SCREENING PROGRAMME WITH SINGAPORE'S LARGEST PINK RIBBON FORMATION

To raise awareness that regular screening and early detection give the best protection against breast cancer, the Health Promotion Board is forming the largest living Pink Ribbon ever seen in Singapore.

Singapore, 29 September 2012: The Health Promotion Board (HPB) will enter the Singapore Book of Records for forming the largest human Pink Ribbon at Waterfront Promenade, made up of a chain of 2,500 women together with their menfolk, children and friends.

2. A universal symbol of breast cancer awareness, the Pink Ribbon is used by people and organisations to promote breast cancer screening and show support for women who have the disease.
3. Recent statistics from HPB's national breast screening programme, BreastScreen Singapore, suggest that women who screen regularly have a 20 per cent higher chance of discovering breast cancer while it is still in its early stage, compared to those who screen opportunistically or do not screen at all.
4. Breast cancer is the most common cancer for women in Singapore. More than 1,500 are diagnosed with the disease every year, with the highest incidence among those between 60 and 69 years old.
5. Successful treatment hinges greatly on early detection, and the screening mammogram is currently the most effective tool in detecting the tiny lumps of early breast cancer, before symptoms can be felt.

6. Working with restructured hospitals and X-ray clinics in the polyclinics, the Health Promotion Board (HPB) launched BreastScreen Singapore in 2002 to provide a national government-subsidised breast screening programme targeted at women aged 50 years and older.

7. Celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, BreastScreen Singapore presently carries out almost half of all screening mammograms in Singapore, and has benefitted nearly 250,000 women.

8. Said Dr Amy Khor, Minister of State for Health and Manpower: “The National Health Survey 2010 shows that only 40 per cent of women aged 50 to 69 have had a screening mammogram over the past two years – even though more than 90 per cent of them are aware of the benefits of mammography. The most common reason why some women have never gone for screening is because they feel it is not necessary as they generally feel healthy, not realising that diseases like breast cancer may not have any symptoms in the early stages. There are also women who had undergone previous mammography but do not follow up with regular screening once every two years because, again, they feel it is not necessary since their previous screening result was normal. Other reasons why women do not go for screening include a fear of the diagnosis and the misperception that the detection of cancer equates to a death sentence. If breast cancer is discovered at an early stage and treated appropriately, the five-year survival rate is more than 95 per cent. The later it is discovered, the lower the survival rate. Since early stages of breast cancer may not have any symptoms, it is important for women to go for regular screening even if they feel well and their previous mammography result was normal. While BreastScreen Singapore has helped to increase awareness of the importance of breast cancer screening from about 40 per cent a decade ago to about 90 per cent today, we hope the programme will also encourage more women to move beyond awareness to action.”

9. Said Mr Ang Hak Seng, Chief Executive Officer, HPB: “Apart from encouraging women 50 years and older to go for screening through personal invitation letters, phone calls and educational materials, HPB has recently made screening even more convenient and affordable for the public by ‘bundling’ screening mammography together with our one-stop community screening for chronic diseases, functional decline and other selected cancers. In order to increase uptake further, especially among women with low socioeconomic status, HPB will step up outreach efforts with grassroots community partners. For the needy who cannot afford mammography, HPB will work with VWOs, corporate partners and the

Singapore Cancer Society to provide assistance. Through our Health Ambassadors, we also seek to help women understand that screening is not something they do only once; it is important to go for regular screening and take advantage of the subsidised BreastScreen Singapore programme.”

10. To detect breast cancer at its early stage successfully, BreastScreen Singapore offers a screening programme that is benchmarked against international best practices. These include having mammogram films read by two separate radiologists, and a centralised screening database that captures screening results and flags cases which need re-screenings or referrals for further assessment.

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