"I miss you": Together against breast cancer with BIG - Let’s save lives and restore hope

Breast cancer has an impact, but each of us can also have an impact by supporting research

According to the most recent statistics, about 11,000 women are affected by breast cancer each year in Belgium, making this the most diagnosed cancer in women in the country1. Unfortunately, this figure is incorrect. Breast cancer also impacts their families, their friends, their loved ones, their colleagues and more. During Pink October, the Breast International Group (BIG), the world’s largest academic network dedicated to breast cancer research, whose head office is in Brussels, is launching its “I miss you” campaign, which aims to increase awareness and encourage the collection of funds to finance the fight against breast cancer.

Pink October – The "I miss you" campaign

For some, “I miss you” reminds them of the pain in their hearts following the loss of a loved one, and the lack of understanding in the eyes of people around them. For others, it will be a matter of grieving for their previous life or for a breast, an important symbol of femininity and maternity.
“I miss you” is also a message of hope. Like a postcard that you send to a friend you are looking forward to seeing again. It is also the hope of soon discovering a new version of yourself, of re-emerging after multiple treatments.

So that neither the breast nor the heart suffers, so that neither loss nor absence takes hold, to bring a message of hope, make a donation to support breast cancer research.

Juliette’s story: breast cancer at 41

Juliette is 45 years old, a Brussels native of Congolese origin, a businesswoman with a five-year-old daughter. She was diagnosed with stage 2 hormone-dependent breast cancer. Four years ago, she felt a lump in her breast and her lymph nodes seemed swollen. At the time, however, she did not take these symptoms seriously, preferring to wait for her next appointment with her gynaecologist, a month later. It was the gynecologist who raised the alarm and initiated Juliette's care by specialists, leading to her “rescue” through various treatments.

Like Juliette, some women are diagnosed with breast cancer at a young age. Around 20% of women affected by breast cancer are diagnosed when they are still of childbearing age (premenopausal)2.

"Even before I realised it was cancer, I was hooked up to my first chemo... I wasn’t ready, but are we ever ready?” Juliette confides.

In fact, at her age this diagnosis came as a punishment in a busy life (a business project, a child, a new house, etc.) and had a significant impact on her and those around her. Her partner was greatly affected as well. Having been by her side throughout the treatments, he showed the first signs of burnout a year after Juliette started her patient journey. Thanks to the support of their GP, she and her partner were able to rebuild their lives. "It’s a process that takes time, whether it’s the patient or their close caregivers. Hence the importance of talking about it, being supported, increasing awareness (during and after the illness). No-one is safe from anything."

Juliette feels more committed than ever. "I might not be here today if someone hadn’t found this drug, which is why I’m here today. […] I think we have an enormous role to play, too. Breast cancer has an impact, of course, but each of us can have an impact by supporting research."

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1 Belgian Cancer Registry
Kris’s story: having breast cancer as a man

Did you know that 1 man in 800 suffers from breast cancer? Little is known about this rare disease. For Kris and all the others, being diagnosed means not benefiting from appropriate treatments and not being able to talk freely about it, because the disease represents a huge taboo. The impact on Kris and his loved ones is considerable.

"The silent reality of breast cancer in men, a taboo topic that remains in the shadows. Many people are unaware that men can be affected by this disease. The treatments fall short, as they still often mirror those used for women, despite significant hormonal differences. It is urgent to bring greater attention to the specific treatment of breast cancer in men, with a focus on genetic and hereditary factors, such as the BRCA1/BRCA2 gene mutations (commonly referred to as the “Angelina Jolie gene”), which are unfortunately frequently silenced out of fear of social and financial consequences. To protect my loved ones and secure our future, I have chosen to share my story without revealing my full name. Let’s break the taboos together and invest wholeheartedly in research, so that a future without breast cancer becomes possible for everyone, regardless of gender." - Kris, 64-years-old, a father, a man with breast cancer, and a carrier of BRCA1/BRCA2 gene mutations.

BIG’s research aims to develop more personalised treatments

BIG has been conducting international clinical trials and research programmes on breast cancer for almost 25 years. The aim is to find more personalised treatments for each patient and each type of breast cancer. Various BIG studies have already revolutionised clinical practice. One of these is the OlympiA study, which showed that a new targeted drug, olaparib, can be used to treat patients with early breast cancer who carry the hereditary BRCA1/BRCA2 gene mutations. The BRCA1/BRCA2 gene mutations are found in approximately 5% of breast cancer patients, particularly common in young patients. The OlympiA study involved 1,836 patients in over 600 hospitals and cancer centres in 23 countries. It demonstrated that olaparib not only reduces the risk of recurrence in cancer patients, but also improves their overall survival, decreasing the risk of death by 32%. Following this international study, olaparib was approved by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and the American Food and Drug Administration (FDA), changing the way in which thousands of patients across the world will be treated from now on. Research is the only way to save lives and spare many families from the impact of the disease.

The 2023 Pink October programme

• 19 September
Press conference and campaign launch, Brussels

• 30 September
BIG day at the Woluwe Shopping Centre, Brussels

• 10 October
BIG – EORTC free webinar "Funding breast cancer research"

• 17 October
BIG Gala Dinner at Autoworld, Brussels

• 21 October
BIG day at the Esplanade Shopping Centre, Louvain-la-Neuve

... and more events to be announced

Some key breast cancer dates

The whole month of October is devoted to breast cancer.

• Saturday, 7 October
Breast Cancer in Men Awareness Day
www.borstkankerman.be

• Friday, 13 October
Metastatic Breast Cancer Awareness Day

Find out more about BIG
www.bigagainstbreastcancer.org

For more information or to request an interview, please contact:
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