

Advisory Visits to the five Reference Centres of the German Mammography Screening



- Executive Summary -

The visiting teams were highly impressed by the successful implementation of this huge nation wide screening project within a very short two to three years period. Especially impressive is the successful attempt to impose a centralised programme (in terms of quality assurance) on a decentralised health care system. However, the local, and indeed, the National Organisation of Breast Screening appears rather complex, with many parallel inter-relationships, and examples of shared responsibility. The danger of this is the risk to clear lines of communication and the difficulties of evaluation.

The Directors of the Reference Centres (RC's) and their staff are highly committed, without any exception, to set up, run and continuously monitor their screening organisation with the ultimate goal to achieve mortality decrease of breast cancer.

The overall rate of participation is in the starting phase rather low, about 50%, very likely due to the so-called opportunistic screening activities outside the programme. A gradual increase in participation rate is to be expected if the centralized project maintains its high quality performance. Other performance indicators received from some of the Centres are within the range of the acceptable and desirable levels of the European Guidelines. However, an overall data reporting and analysing system is not yet completely in function and the RC's have often no complete view on the performance of the Screening Units (SU's) under their responsibility.

It is a general concern of the visiting teams whether the broad responsibility of the RC's towards the SU's concerning the overall quality control of the process is linked to a necessary level of authority as well. Without such an authority it will be difficult for the RC's to execute their responsibilities towards the SU's. The RC needs to be seen as more than just responsible for data collection, physical QA and training- it must also have the power to influence organisation, professional performance and suspend unsatisfactory smaller units if necessary.

All RC's have specialized training programmes for radiographers and radiologists and are organising a large number of courses yearly for these professionals.

All RC's and their attached Mammography Units (MU's) have good siting, environment, adequate place, and facilities. We were not in the position to visit other MU's other than the MU attached to the RC.

The visiting teams were very pleased with the open discussions and the great amount of information concerning the organisation structure of the RC's and also of the entire National Screening Programme. We are also grateful to the staff of the RC's for all the tedious work with regard to the preparation of the visits, especially the preparation of the cases for review and the fine atmosphere.

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