The Breast Care Centre of Excellence, Netcare Milpark Hospital

Media Statement

International accreditation for South Africa’s foremost breast care centre

Netcare Milpark breast programme lauded for being outstanding

Thursday, 6 April 2016, The Netcare Milpark Breast Care Centre of Excellence has been granted a three-year, full accreditation by the National Accreditation Program for Breast Centers (NAPBC), administered by the American College of Surgeons.

The facility, which was the first breast care centre of excellence to be established in the private sector in South Africa some 16 years ago, received 100% compliance to 29 standards. This is a remarkable feat for South African healthcare, given that there are at present only three breast care centres outside the USA that have been accredited by the NAPBC.

Commenting on the news, renowned specialist surgeon and breast disease specialist, Professor Carol Ann Benn, who established the Netcare Milpark Breast Care Centre of Excellence in association with Netcare, said that international accreditation of the facility is a particularly noteworthy development for South African patients, as it validates and fully supports the multidisciplinary approach that has long been the foundation of the work being done by the team at the centre.

“Too many patients are faced with having to make alarming and stressful decisions about their health without the knowledge or any idea of where to turn. Accreditation ensures that careful due process protects patients within the healthcare system, who are at their most vulnerable when faced with a diagnosis of cancer.”

“The accreditation guarantees ‘protected’ patient care by ensuring that all patients’ treatment options are discussed by a team of experts and that doctors are required to follow safe international guidelines when suggesting treatment options. In other words, there is no possibility of an individual doctor imposing rushed treatment suggestions on patients,” asserts Professor Benn.

Receiving care at an NAPBC-accredited centre holds many advantages for patients, as it ensures that they will have access to:

- comprehensive care, including a full range of state-of-the-art services;
- a multidisciplinary team approach to coordinate the best treatment options;
- information about on-going clinical trials and new treatment options; and
- top quality breast care, right here in South Africa.

The NAPBC citation lauded the Netcare Milpark Breast Care Centre, its multidisciplinary team of physicians and comprehensive administrative and support staff, which includes patient navigators and survivorship specialists who provide professional and compassionate care for patients with breast disease in South Africa. “The Netcare Milpark breast programme is outstanding. The physicians and staff are committed to providing care compliant with the standards outlined by the NAPBC. We congratulate them on obtaining NAPBC accreditation,” stated the citation.
The centre follows a comprehensive approach to the management of breast conditions and diseases. The multidisciplinary teams of healthcare professionals at the centre are involved in the diagnosis, clinical assessment, counselling, treatment including breast reconstruction, and patient support. The centre is, furthermore, highly focused on community initiatives including awareness, education, and access to care for patients who do not have comprehensive medical insurance.

According to Professor Benn, the management of conditions and diseases affecting the breast is a highly specialised medical field offering treatments for affected women, men and adolescents. “Tremendous advances have been made in this field of medicine in the last decade or so, especially regarding the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer.”

“Nowadays the vast majority of conditions can be successfully treated without surgery and all without emergency surgery. Patients faced with breast conditions are often rushed into treatment but the old fashioned radical mastectomy is an operation of the past. Today, almost all women should have choice around the different types of cancer surgery. They should also have access to immediate reconstructions undertaken by a specialised team, and should under no circumstances be having surgery to ‘find out if this is cancer’,” asserts Professor Benn.

“Accreditation internationally has improved patient care by ensuring doctor compliance to high standards and clinical governance. Accredited units have to collect data, as well as feedback, on outcomes while ensuring high standards.”

Professor Benn adds, “I always knew that the team at Netcare Milpark Breast Care Centre was offering the highest standard of care, but the correct way to ensure this was to go through a strict audit. It has been a difficult but worthwhile journey, and a learning curve requiring many hours of reflection by all the doctors. This involved independent specialists opening their files and honestly assessing what is being offered to patients, as well as relooking and reassessing aspects of care to ensure that, going forward, all our patients will benefit from the highest international standard of care. This process has brought the team even closer together.

“High-profile campaigns in the media have made most South African women aware that breast cancer poses a very real risk. However, the public should also be mindful that we are seeing younger and younger women. The message we need to convey is that this disease can affect anyone and that most women who get breast cancer do not have risk factors.

“The implication for South African women is important: we should be taking proactive steps for women to be ‘breast aware’ from a young age. The earlier it is detected and treated, the better the prognosis. When it comes to treating a cancer that has been diagnosed, our Centre will tailor-make the treatment to the specific needs of the patient. “Every woman has a unique relationship with her breasts, and we take that into account,” says Professor Benn.

Paying tribute to the team at the Netcare Milpark Breast Care Centre of Excellence, Noeleen Phillipson, oncology executive at Netcare; commented that the accreditation was a remarkable feat that was achieved thanks to the dedicated team at Netcare Milpark Hospital who have, under the leadership of Professor Benn, worked many long hours to reach this goal.
“Thank you and congratulations to the multidisciplinary team of healthcare professionals, as well as to the support staff at Netcare Milpark Hospital, who were involved in the accreditation programme. A special word of thanks goes to Professor Benn for her vision and leadership. The accreditation affirms the high standard of care offered by Professor Benn and her team, and provides the perfect foundation for a value-based healthcare reimbursement model for breast cancer,” she added.

Jacques du Plessis, managing director of Netcare’s hospital division, also paid tribute to the team, stating that this is an important development for patients, for the team at the Breast Care Centre of Excellence, for Netcare Milpark Hospital and for healthcare in South Africa, as this accreditation has never before been achieved in South Africa or elsewhere in Africa.

“One of the best ways to maintain the highest standards of patient care and safety is to obtain independent, international accreditation of the highest level. The rigorous NAPBC accreditation process examined adherence to a stringent set of quality service criteria within the Netcare Milpark Breast Care Centre of Excellence and this, in itself, is an endorsement of the incredible work that is being done by this team of healthcare professionals under the leadership of the highly regarded Professor Carol Ann Benn.

He adds that within the hospital context, quality of care and the best possible clinical outcomes, together with service excellence, form the basis of our commitment to patients. “Netcare prides itself on providing our patients with world-class, quality care in the most modern and sophisticated healthcare facilities in South Africa. Prof Benn and her team are the embodiment of excellence at every level of the holistic service offered by the team,” he concludes.

Ends

• More about NAPBC accreditation

Accreditation by the NAPBC is only given to those centres that have voluntarily committed to provide the highest level of quality breast care and to undergo a rigorous evaluation process and review of their performance. During the survey process, the centre must demonstrate compliance with standards established by the NAPBC for treating women who are diagnosed across the full spectrum of breast disease. The standards include proficiency in the areas of centre leadership, multidisciplinary management of clinical cases, research, community outreach, professional education, and quality improvement/outcomes measurement. A breast centre that achieves NAPBC accreditation has demonstrated a firm commitment to offer its patients every significant advantage in their battle against breast disease.

The NAPBC is a consortium of American professional organisations dedicated to the improvement of the quality of care and monitoring of outcomes of patients with diseases of the breast. This mission is pursued through standard-setting, scientific validation, and patient and professional education. Its board membership includes professionals from 20 American organisations, reflecting the full spectrum of breast care. For more information about the NAPBC, visit its website at www.accreditedbreastcenters.org.