

# SPARC Metastatic

## Breast Cancer Challenge

Addressing the needs of people living with advanced breast cancer



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Over half a million people died from breast cancer worldwide in 2018, making it the leading cause of cancer deaths among women<sup>1</sup>. When left too late or left undiagnosed or untreated altogether, breast cancer can become metastatic, spreading to other parts of the body such as the lungs, brain, liver and bones.

Metastatic breast cancer (MBC) represents the most advanced stage of breast cancer, with no current cure. However, in many cases, treatment can provide an opportunity to potentially prolong survival and preserve the quality of a patient's life.

### The challenges of MBC

People living with cancer, including MBC, can often struggle to understand their diagnosis, to access timely and quality treatment (including palliative care), and may lack financial, psychological and social support. Compounding these challenges, MBC patients have a high chance of developing anxiety and depression, which can lead to social isolation and marginalisation.

### Championing new MBC ideas to save lives

In 2015, recognising the urgent needs of MBC patients, UICC teamed up with Pfizer Oncology to launch the **Seeding Progress and Resources for the Cancer Community (SPARC) MBC Challenge**. This global grant initiative seeks to support new ideas and projects from advocacy groups, hospital networks and other non-for-profit organisations working to address the specific needs of MBC patients.

With the ambition of saving more lives by reducing the number of women diagnosed with breast cancer at a late stage, SPARC projects focus on closing the gap in patient information and support, growing awareness, influencing national policies and strengthening health systems.

Through training, networking, mentoring and financial support, the SPARC MBC Challenge has awarded grants to over 50 organisations\* from 35 countries, helping to get their projects off the ground.

1. [www.who.int/cancer/prevention/diagnosis-screening/breast-cancer/en](http://www.who.int/cancer/prevention/diagnosis-screening/breast-cancer/en)

\* The SPARC MBC Challenge applications are selected by the SPARC Selection Advisory Group, an independent group of international experts in breast cancer led by ABC Global Alliance's Chair, Dr Fatima Cardoso.

## Impact on the ground

The SPARC MBC Challenge has a significant impact. Since 2015, SPARC grantees report that their projects have helped over 14,000\*\* MBC patients around the world, and more than 140,000\*\* individuals are now better educated and informed on the disease and the challenges it presents for MBC patients.

### Trinidad & Tobago: creating Caribbean's first patient navigation programme

In **Trinidad & Tobago**, the Caribbean Cancer Research Initiative (CCRI) used its SPARC grant to launch the **first patient navigation programme in the Caribbean**. An initial analysis of the specific needs of MBC patients in Trinidad & Tobago has helped CCRI to effectively **train 28 health professionals** on how to better provide supportive care to MBC patients in their cancer journey. The SPARC project also included the development of an **online platform** where patients and their navigator can **more easily communicate**, interact and provide and receive support. A referral pathway for MBC patients was also set up within public oncology units in Trinidad to complement the public health system. CCRI is now currently working to extend the navigation programme to colon, cervical and lung cancer patients.

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*"Very simply, without the SPARC grant this programme would not have been possible. The credibility of UICC, the networks we gained across the world, the mentorship through conferences, webinars and of course the financial support allowed us to be taken seriously in this sphere and opened many doors."*

**Kimberly Badal, Executive Director, CCRI**

### Tajikistan: destigmatising metastatic breast cancer across a nation

In **Tajikistan**, stigma and discrimination present a major barrier to treatment for breast cancer patients. Working to destigmatise the disease is Avesto, a patient advocacy group. Their SPARC project is helping to **raise the patient voices at a national, regional and community level**. As a result of a public nation-wide information campaign by Avesto, patient voices have been represented in key political meetings. **Their voice is seen as having played a pivotal role in the policy changes** that have followed since, as well as the **increased financial support** from the government to oncology departments around the country. Avesto also hosted roundtables with journalists helping to raise the profile of MBC through national press coverage in the print and broadcast media. The 700 members of the public who took part in the information campaign are now more aware of MBC, patient challenges and the availability of treatment in their communities. These actions combined, the SPARC project directly engaged an estimated 20,000 people.

### Canada: closing the financial information gap for MBC patients

In **Canada**, 82% of the Canadian Breast Cancer Network's patients reported, in 2018, economic hardship as a result of their MBC diagnosis. Though help is often available, many MBC patients are not aware of the available financial support in the country nor how to access it. To address this information gap, the Canadian Breast Cancer Network used their SPARC grant to create **'the first electronic database in the country'** allowing MBC patients to **easily find information** in one place on **financial resources** available in their area and **how this support can be accessed**. The Canadian Breast Cancer Network also made sure that the 'Financial Navigator' was available for early breast cancer patients.

\*\* Information describing the impact of the SPARC projects have been reported by the respective SPARC grantee.





### Kenya: an online hub to ease communications between patients and healthcare providers

In **Kenya**, approximately 6000 people were diagnosed with breast cancer in 2018<sup>2</sup>, and whilst exact figures are not known, it is estimated that a large proportion of these have advanced breast cancer at diagnosis. Many of these women are marginalised from society, and lack appropriate psychological and medical guidance. In a move to improve the quality of life of these women, the Aga Khan University Hospital in Nairobi - in partnership with the Kenya Metastatic Breast Cancer Network - have launched a **dedicated website and smartphone application to provide quality information** to patients, the general public, policy makers, and medical practitioners. Since its rollout, **it has become the national online hub for information on virtual support groups, clinical trials, nearby health facilities, educational videos and lifestyle advice** on exercise and diet for MBC patients. The ambition is that the website and smartphone application will reach 75% of MBC patients in the country.

2. [https://gco.iarc.fr/today/online-analysis-pie?v=2018&mode=cancer&mode\\_population=continents&population=900&populations=404&key=total&sex=0&cancer=39&type=0&statistic=5&prevalence=0&population\\_group=0&ages\\_group%5B%5D=0&ages\\_group%5B%5D=17&nb\\_items=7&group\\_cancer=1&include\\_nmssc=1&include\\_nmssc\\_other=1&half\\_pie=0&donut=0&population\\_group\\_globocan\\_id=](https://gco.iarc.fr/today/online-analysis-pie?v=2018&mode=cancer&mode_population=continents&population=900&populations=404&key=total&sex=0&cancer=39&type=0&statistic=5&prevalence=0&population_group=0&ages_group%5B%5D=0&ages_group%5B%5D=17&nb_items=7&group_cancer=1&include_nmssc=1&include_nmssc_other=1&half_pie=0&donut=0&population_group_globocan_id=)



For more information about the SPARC MBC Challenge, please visit [www.uicc.org/SPARC](http://www.uicc.org/SPARC) or contact the UICC team at [sparc@uicc.org](mailto:sparc@uicc.org)



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