



## Coming out for breast cancer country by country

Walks to raise awareness of breast cancer are established traditions in many countries. But in many more, breast cancer remains hidden from public and political agendas. Avon's Walk Around the World helped connect everyone fighting to raise the profile of breast cancer across the globe.

**T**hroughout October tens of thousands of men and women from more than 30 countries across the world took to the streets as part of the Avon Walk Around the World for Breast Cancer. Many of the walks were linked by a Global Connection Ribbon that was passed on from a survivor in one country to the next in a chain of solidarity. The event, also supported by Novartis, was organised to mark the 50th anniversary of the Avon Foundation, set up to support initiatives to improve the lives of women, with a particular focus on breast cancer.

The Avon Foundation prides itself on taking an intelligent, needs-based approach to supporting the fight against breast cancer. It focuses on promoting medical research,





HUNGARY

Walk Around the World for Breast Cancer events took place in more than 30 countries.

In Europe, this included Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine and the UK



CANADA

awareness, and access to care, screening and high-quality diagnostics, and on supporting community-based groups that can reach the most poorly served populations.

Though the Avon Foundation is based in the US, Avon philanthropy is active worldwide. In Europe, it supports organisations like Mamazone in Germany and Amazons in Poland – two very effective advocacy groups, both heavily geared towards helping patients get the information they need. The Foundation is also funding fellowships for breast cancer doctors from eastern Europe to study in the US.

Walk Around the World for Breast Cancer provided an opportunity to show solidarity between breast cancer survivors in different parts of the world fighting for greater awareness of breast cancer under very different conditions

– from the US, where women put breast cancer on the political map decades ago, to countries in central/eastern and southern Europe, China and East Asia, in many of which breast cancer remains a taboo.

Wang Boaling is a 58-year-old breast cancer survivor from Beijing, who joined the Chinese leg of Walk Around the World, up the Great Wall. She welcomed the chance to speak out about breast cancer. “If women paid more attention to their health it would be easier to find the cancer and treat it. Here in China breast cancer is still something you do not talk about easily. After my operation, I reflected a lot on what I could do. I wanted to show the world that cancer did not stop me and show other women that it should not stop them either. It was very impressive to stand on such a powerful



POLAND



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symbolic monument as the Great Wall and look out and see the hundreds of women with their families and friends who were also climbing the Wall for the same reason.”

Reluctance to speak about breast cancer is also hampering progress in dealing with the disease in much of Europe. Patient organisations in Romania talk of difficulties in securing local authority grants, because of the assumption that people with cancer are going to die and there is nothing anyone can do about it. The Avon walk – the first ever in Bucharest – therefore offered a welcome opportunity to raise the profile of breast cancer. “The whole initiative, from the press conference to the walk and after-walk festivities was a success,” said Judy Zerwitz, a 65-year-old breast cancer survivor representing the US, who had flown over to join the Romanian walk. “About

500 lively and energetic people turned up to show their support for breast cancer. There was music and people were having fun; it was all out in the open – both literally and figuratively speaking.”

Avon has organised walks to raise breast cancer awareness in a number of countries for many years. Last October’s Walk Around the World for Breast Cancer provided the impetus to organise walks for the first time in places that do not have this tradition, and the Global Connection Ribbon focused on the importance of solidarity between advocacy groups in different countries. This is important because levels of cancer awareness differ substantially across Europe, and it is only when cancer becomes a significant public issue that politicians and decision makers start to do something about it.

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