

## **Acknowledgements**

The word cancer evokes varying responses but generally it is one of panic, pain and incurability. To a survivor, it is the memories of the trauma of diagnosis, the various phases in the journey through treatment, follow-up and finally the joy of return to normal living . To one who has lost a dear and near one, it is the memories of the sorrow of the loss, the miseries undergone and questions relating to causation of cancer, can it be prevented and successfully treated? If so why did I lose my dear one?

I started collecting memories from patients who were willing to share their experiences, Many hesitated for various reasons especially the “stigma” about cancer still seems to carry. The memories received were certainly revealing and some of them inspiring.

Oncologic care has many facets, not just diagnosis and successful treatment. It is a comprehensive care. The focus moves from care beyond cure to healing – the capacity to live a full meaningful life. How much of this has been possible? The memories provide some insight.

The objective of the publication is to pass on the message of a survivor to the public, survivors and patients as a means to provide answers to many doubts and fears about cancer and dispel some of the myths. My comments are made essentially to add general information on cancer awareness.

My grateful thanks to Mr N Ram of The Hindu for accepting to write the preface. It has certainly added a new dimension to our effort.

My profound thanks to Mrs. Mini Krishnan and Mrs. Gracey Varghese for their total commitment in taking care of all the preliminaries needed for a useful attractive and purposeful publication.

To the many survivors who have contributed, and act as our ambassadors for cancer control. Just a thanks is hardly enough. Their participation has made all the difference to our efforts.

**Dr. V.Shanta**  
**Chairman**

## Foreword

The fear of cancer is no ordinary thing. A near universal phenomenon reflecting observed reality, unknowing, and prejudice, it can be characterized as “nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts” (to borrow a memorable phrase from the 1933 inaugural address of an American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt) to respond to a challenge that seems like no other in the life of an individual or a family. Thanks to revolutionary advances in scientific knowledge, diagnosis, and treatment of cancers and hard won improved awareness among the public, social attitudes towards what was once seen as calamitous are changing.

However, progress has been held back by the slowness of national health policy in responding to the challenge. That 28 demographic registries have been established to collect data on new cancer cases among an 80-million population segment is an advance but the coverage of rural India where most Indians live and work has been extremely poor. And quite inexplicably considering that the disease burden has been increasing over the decades and is projected to increase significantly in the next decade, cancer is yet to be declared a notifiable disease. Another major problem is the negative portrayal of cancer in the media and in public culture; thanks to awareness campaigns, there has been some improvement here and there but the problem persists and continues to take a toll on social attitudes and the morale of cancer patients and their families.

No institution and leader I know of has contributed more, over the long term, to the overcoming of morbidity and mortality in a major public health area than the Cancer Institute (WIA), Chennai and its Chairperson, Dr V Shanta. It was no run-of-the-mill tribute that was recorded in the citation for the 12005 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Public Service; “In an era when specialized medical care in India has become highly commercialized, Dr Shanta strives to ensure that the institute remains true to its ethos, “Service to all”. Its services are free or subsidized for some 60 per cent of its 100,000 annual patients. Seventy-eight-year old Shanta still sees patients, still performs surgery and is still on call twenty-four hours a day.

Compassion and caring, and extraordinary empathy with patients and their families drawn from all sections of society combined with professional excellence and being state-of-the-art in the diagnosis, treatment, and control of cancer to produce a highly positive attitude that inspires confidence in patients. It is this combination that invests the institution Dr Shanta heads with its inestimable asset – the trust of hundreds of thousands of people who have bene through its gates over six decades.

Cancer, in the words of Dr Shanta is “an extremely complex biological phenomenon... not a single disease... (but) a generic name for a wide spectrum of conditions, biologically different ... (where) even the carcinogenesis is different”. Family health books tell us that there are about

200 different kinds of cancer but that the problem always centres on the uncontrolled growth and spread of abnormal cells. This certainly does not mean human beings are helpless in the hands of Fate, or are pawns in the hands of some impossibly chaotic game of chance. With further progress in genomic studies, it is expected that some key unresolved questions about the complex biological phenomenon of cancer will be answered.

My Journey: Memories is a weave of diverse, simple, moving mostly inspiring stories - lived experience that features shock, 'nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror', fatalism but also, in good measure, intelligence, understanding, resilience, courage, strong family bonds, human solidarity and a shared sense of community, and ultimately victory over the disease. The women in the stories come through particularly strongly. There is spontaneity, poetry, complex emotions, discordance, and deep feeling here, presented with very little editorial intervention or mediation.

What about the future? "With the present available medical knowledge, Dr. Shanta informs us, 'we are curing one out of three. But we have the potential to cure two out of three, provided the disease is detected and treated early. The balance one out of three still remains in an area of study'. After reading these personal testimonies of cancer survivors, we come away persuaded that Dr Shanta's promise can be fulfilled sooner than we expect - provided early detection and treatment by state-of-the-art, altruistic medicine can combine with positive patient attitudes, trust in the doctors, affective support from family members and friends, and a health care system that does not discriminate between rich and poor.

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Director, Kasturi & Sons Limited,  
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# An Active Life

Vinod V.Sarma

Vimala Sarma was born in 1925 in a large family in South India, Her father was a school teacher, She was an active child who enjoyed walking a mile to school (four times daily) playing games, climbing trees, cycling etc. After school she got married and moved to Delhi in 1945, where she set up her first house. She had to children and life seemed to be smooth, but for her husband's frequent transfers necessitating change of house, schools, and friends.

In 1976, when Vimala Sarma was 50, she was diagnosed with cancer of the breast and underwent mastectomy (surgery) for removal of the tumor. Life came back to normal once again and the cancer was forgotten. But that was not to be. Twenty years later she had severe pain in her leg. The cancer had not left her, but had spread to the bones. She underwent chemotherapy and radiation with all their attendant side effects like loss of appetite, weakness etc. After a month of this treatment though, she was back to her normal routine.

After 1996, every two or three years the cancer would remind her that it had not left her with severe pain in different parts of her skeleton that was affected by tumors. Each time she would undergo radiation for a month. Fortunately the pain would reduce and go away after a few weeks. A few years, later, two of her vertebrae collapsed because of the metastases in her backbone, but she still walked erect. After each radiation treatment, she would get back to her normal life. The Adyar Cancer Institute, Chennai recognized her as one of their long surviving cancer patients and arranged for her to meet and encourage other cancer patients.

She managed her household in Chennai where she stayed with her husband till he passed away in 1998. She then moved in with her son and daughter-in-law. She had many interests – cooking, gardening, knitting, embroidery, stitching, reading and music. She was always busy making something or the other – be it a quilted wall-hanging or a crocheted table cloth. Her first love was travel, and she did not hesitate to fly off unaccompanied to her daughter's house in the UK or visit her sister in the US. She accompanied her family for cruise to the Bahamas, even trying out singing in a hammock! She loved to go for walks especially in hill stations where she could appreciate the variety of flowers and plants.

She kept up with current events and news and always had something to say on politics, cricket, films, TV Serials or whatever topic was being discussed. New technology, computers? No problems – in her late seventies, Vimala Sarma learnt to operate a computer and send emails by herself. Sudoku? She took it up as a daily pastime. No wonder, people who met her could never guess she suffered from Cancer.

But the good times had to come to an end. Her battle against Cancer had gone on for 32 years. In December 2007, she had accumulated liquid in her legs. Investigation showed that the cancer had now spread to her liver, with multiple lesions or tumors . She was 82 years and with the cancer attacking her soft tissues like the liver, further investigations like biopsies and scans seemed to be pointless and would only increase her pain and suffering.

The Bangalore Baptist Hospital was consulted and their palliative and Home Care team registered her as a patient. Their team consisted of a specially trained doctor and nurses would visit home every week and suggest measures and treatment to reduce her pain and discomfort. The team members were well informed and compassionate. Thanks to them, Vimala Sarma could be at home surrounded by her family members when she passed away in February 2008.

To be diagnosed with cancer need not mean the end of life. With a positive outlook and enthusiasm one can do anything one sets one's heart on. After all, Vimala Sarma proved it by leading an active life for over three decades even after cancer struck her!

Vinod Sarma, son of Vimala Sarma is with the Indian School of Business, Hyderabad.

- This is a narration of the life of breast cancer patient made by her sons who had witnessed their mother's journey from diagnosis through treatment, a happy survival of over 20 years, leading a normal life, from 1976 to 1998. She was an active housewife, mother to her sons and looked after her husband till he passed away.
- The description of her life during those 20-22 years shows that she had nothing to complain of, led a happy life and had forgotten that she had cancer.
- Unfortunately cancer recurred after 20 years in her bones and later in the liver.
- This does happen in about 10% of cases and this is the challenge that researchers are trying to solve

- The concept of cancer care today is not just cure but care and control and more importantly quality care
- Today's concept of palliative care – (supportive care/ Hospice care) is a remarkable blend of humanity and science – It is a delicate and sensitive balance of social and vocational diversion and professional care)
- The need for palliative care centres is gaining momentum. However, it involves a dynamic maintenance of quality of life, psycho spiritual support and relief of symptoms, the main object will be to help the patient to fade away with dignity.
- A highly dedicated, motivated team is necessary, a team that will take it as a mission.

## **My Story**

**P.S.Narayanan**

I am trying to give the true history of the treatment in the Cancer Institute from 20.06.1983 till today. I was working in TVS at Pudukottai. On 14.04.1983, Tamil New Year's Day, while having dinner, a tooth on the right side of my mouth broke as I bit into a small stone in the food. As a result the tooth had sharp edges and started irritating my tongue. I took treatment at TVS hospital, Pudukottai for more than a month. By that time the right side of my tongue had developed a wound. My company doctor suspected cancer and advised me to go to the Cancer Institute, Adyar, Chennai. After several tests and biopsy of the tongue, I was asked to get admitted in Cancer Institute, Canal Road on 20.06.1983 for radiation, but it was postponed as I developed fever which rose to 104F. They put ice bars on my head and tried to reduce it and finally radiation was given on 11.7.1983 (which was my Wedding Day). They gave 8000 rads and after that I was discharged on 26.07.1983 and advised to visit as an out-patient. I was staying in my uncle's house and from where I visited for chemotherapy for 15 days, i.e., on Tuesdays and Thursdays. On 13.09.1983 I underwent the major operation regarding the removal of right side jaw bone which took 4 hours. I was discharged on 30.09.1983.

It is my duty to thank the Doctors and the entire team of nurses of your institute who all dedicated their services to be during the treatment.

I used to say always that Teachers and Doctors are all representatives of the Almighty.

In this instance my entire family is ever grateful to TVS Management for the entire medical assistances and moral encouragement given to me during this treatment and even now they are taking care of me for review check-ups.

My sincere heartfelt condolences to Dr Krishnamoorthy and Dr Shastry. May they always know peace. They were dedicated as they spent entire time in this institution so that many survivors are still there.

In this instance self and wife and my children are ever grateful to my family members for their good Prayers. I came out successfully from the Institute. Also I am thankful to the well-wishers of my best and beloved top executives and friends in TVS Pudukottai and other branches.

I saw many poor patients are taking treatment; they are all treated well with required compassion irrespective of caste, religion and nationality.

To the best of my ability, I am donating a small amount every year for the expansion of the hospital.

May this grow into a bigger institution with more dedication to everyone.

- This is the narration of a patient aged 39 years with Cancer of the Tongue who reported for treatment in 1983.
- Cancers of the oral cavity, cheek, gingium and tongue are all tobacco related cancers. Of all cancers that we see 80% are tobacco related – About 10-20% are non-tobacco users Narayanan is one of them.
- Non Tobacco oral cancers can be genetic. The other factors are chronic irritation and poor oral hygiene.
- The message is
  - Maintenance of good oral hygiene – brushing the teeth twice a day not only in the morning but one at bed time also
  - Avoid ill-fitting dentures
  - Avoid irritation by sharp ragged tooth – consult a doctor immediately.
  - Chronic irritation can be a cause of cancer.

If we had come earlier, he could have been treated without surgery.



## Story

**Ramani Koshy**

Never knew what pain was and agonizing moments until I encountered Cancer – a silent killer face to face. A high school teacher in Chennai and New Delhi for the past 35 years and now retired in 2009 March.

Born in the year 1948 Dec; married in the year 1977 Dec; first and only child in 1979 Aug;

It all started in 1983 March while in Delhi when I happened to feel, a hard spot above the right breast. Biopsy and examination clearly showed malignancy with nodes in the axial of my right side but it was the beginning stage – Medullary Carcinoma. I was set for the battle against the foe with lots of individuals and groups praying for me and for the doctors who were going to take medical decisions for me. In 1983 June I entered the portals of the old Cancer Hospital Adyar. A totally different set – an unusual hospital with long corridor and patients from all walks of life treated with no difference. This touched me.

My doctor, young and energetic, after examining me just said “We’ll do our best”. The verbal assurance helped to regain my confidence in the doctors and then my journey in and out of the Cancer hospital started. Observing each patient conversing with them patiently listening to their experiences and silently praying for these and myself. A few fellow patients and staff acquaintances regarded me as an inspiration and encouragement and strength during my visits and hospitalization. The treatment started with chemos and radiations – this was the most painful period. I owe my thanks to Dr Ranjani for her support. After two months I went back to Delhi, then returned and on 6<sup>th</sup> Oct 1983 – total mastectomy was performed. I’ve read and seen picture of the cellular jail in Port Blair, I perceived the same but here the care and support was immensely beyond measure. I was discharged within five days and returned to Delhi to rejoin the school.

In 1985 May my doctor suggested Oophorectomy – as she knew it was good for me. It was performed. Again on 9.6.1986 to 16.3.1987 I underwent chemotherapy. After that till today by the grace of God I am perfectly fit.

I faithfully adhered to all their advice and the mode of treatment. Did all the tests, I was asked to do. Every 3 months, 6 months and yearly check-ups I came to Adyar with the medical reports and the test results – a chest x-ray, US Abdomen, US of the other breast. After 20 years I was advised that I had entered a safe period but even today I make it a point to do the tests yearly and

report at the institute. I even inform them if I experience any other ailment. Because I believe this will help them in their progress in the field of oncology. Ailments which attacked me during these years – Rheumatoid Arthritis, Sarcodosis, Herpes and now irritable Bowel Syndrome.

I have survived – No – I've conquered. How? By the grace of God, secondly by the untiring efforts of the Doctors, thirdly the love and care I got from the medical department in the institution, and lastly, I do not neglect any lump or unusual occurrence in my body.

- This is again a story of a breast cancer patient who was successfully treated. She had stage II disease and was also very compliant to medical advice.
- There are many narrations of breast cancers in this series.
- Breast cancer was the second commonest malignancy in women up to 1990s.
- Today breast cancer incidence has gone up and it has replaced cervical cancer and take the top rank among cancers in women. This is essentially related to changing life style factors – late age at marriage, late age at first child birth, inadequate breast feeding, high fat / cholesterol food, sedentary life and obesity. 10% of breast cancer have a familial predisposition.
- Breast is an easily accessible organ. Any woman can feel the breast and notice the appearance of a thickening or a lump and have a medical advice.
- Early detection is easy and the options for early breast cancers are many
- More than 80% of early breast cancers can be treated without mastectomy.

## Memories

**Chitra Mahesh**

It does not seem that long ago – though if one went by the years it was in 1988/90 that I was first made aware of an institution called the Cancer Institute. As far as I was concerned such things existed for others not for me, certainly not for my husband of just two and a half years. But then life has its ways of teaching lessons and this introduction is a lesson that I have been experiencing now, so many years later.

The story of our lives, Mahesh and mine, is not really new. Many know about how this wonderful person lost his luminescence and energies to cancer. Many also know how in the three instances that it struck him, he was given leases of life not just because of his extremely positive approach to it but also because of the support and care he received from the team of dedicated doctors at the Cancer Institute.

When we first came into the Cancer Institute most things passed in a blur. We didn't know anyone and we were just part of the multitude that thronged the OP section on any given day. Over the constant announcements of patients we pathetically tried to make sense of what had overtaken us. We were housed in Patel Block, I remember as we waited for the verdict. Mahesh's family and a few friends were with us in the room when we were told that Mahesh would have to be admitted immediately for Thoracotomy to investigate the mass lodged near the lung and heart. For me at 26, things didn't register very well, plus cancer was not that rampant. All I knew was that this fun-loving man was going to be stuffed into a room and cut open. I couldn't even cry. What followed was a long saga. Perhaps left for a book but I remember how with such meager facilities and rooms. Mahesh underwent treatment for a year – through ups and downs, through bad and good moments and then again he was cleared. To live again, which he did beautifully. Like a pristine example of what medicine, mind and spirit can do.

But then the disease showed up again. Almost like reminder of the fragile equation between mortality and life. It was back to the Cancer Institute after many protests from Mahesh – not because he didn't like the place but because he dreaded the treatment, the nausea, the punctures, and the long spells away from normality. But this time, the doctors promised him that many things would be different. For starters any major procedures would be under anesthesia and there were good medicines to prevent nausea. To cut a long story short, the treatment went on for 6 months and it was not without its moments of dread and pain. I remember an instance of septicemia when Mahesh was in the ICU. Believe me it is not a pretty place. But we went through it, thanks to the friendliness and cheer of the nursing staff, who were also as dedicated as the doctors.

We were happy that we didn't have to see the institute of a while. Oh! By now most of them were good friends. Mahesh would even joke that he would have like to have invited them home for a drink but somehow never got around to doing that. Which is probably why cancer decided to become Mahesh's constant reminder of the Institute. It came back!!

But this time the body was worn out. And though the spirit was willing the flesh was not and after a truly spirited battle the man stopped fighting . The doctors were devastated. Not because they didn't anticipate the outcome but because by now they believed like everybody else, that Mahesh and his courage could not be beaten. The team of doctors was upset because they believed that Mahesh was a shining example of how courage, a positive attitude and common sense can help fight cancer, which the Institute is trying to communicate.

In all our years of association with the Institute we have been seeing the dedication with which each one works to help the poor. Unfortunately the treatment and other follow up procedures costs enormous amounts of money. Balancing the various elements was a major task, something that bothered Mahesh all the time he spent there. It was thus his dying wish that something concrete be done to help them in their endeavors. I remember him lying in bed with all his transfusions going on discussing ways of raising funds with the doctors. That wish got translated into reality when Mahesh's wonderful friends (God bless them all), got together to form a trust – the Mahesh Memorial Trust – which has dedicated itself to helping the Cancer Institute and has in the process, helped many children who cannot afford the treatment. Children, because Mahesh loved kids and he just could not bear to see them suffer. He wanted to do something to make them more comfortable.

The first fund raiser of the trust was the A R Rahman show that was successful in not only creating awareness about the trust's work but also in helping the trust to place the funds so collected to build a pediatric ward for children to have a place of their own and recuperate. The bhoomi puja for the building at the old Institute at Gandhi Nagar, Adyar was done on October 5, 2003 and hopefully when it is completed we will all see Mahesh smiling through those children who will romp their way to a life renewed with hope and reasonable health.

- Mahesh, 33 years old male, a well-known popular musical director reported to the Cancer Institute (WIA) in May 1989 with a massive mediastina mass which was diagnosed as a Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma after biopsy.
- There are many types of Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma but unfortunately Non Hodgkin Lymphoma (T cell Type) and the mediastinal presentation were both considered unfavorable factors.
- He responded well to chemo radiation and was well for 8 years. He relapsed in 1996 and achieved a remission. However when he relapsed a second time in 2002, the disease could not be controlled.
- Today significant advances in chemotherapy for B Cell Lymphomas are available but T cell lymphomas continue to be a challenge.
- Mr Mahesh was extremely sensitive to his surroundings and environment. Being very fond of children he always thought of how he can help children with cancer. He was aware that lymphomas and acute

leukemias constituted over 50% of pediatric cancers.

- It was his dream to provide the Cancer Institute with a comprehensive pediatric cancer centre. By 1990s many pediatric cancers were being categorized i.e curable cancers.
- Pediatric cancer is a story of therapeutic success.
- In his memory has arisen the beautiful comprehensive pediatric centre – the “Mahesh Memorial Pediatric Cancer Centre”. The vision of the centre for the children is “They shall always have a tomorrow”. It is a centre of vision of hope.
- We are curing over 60% of the children with cancer. We only wish we could have done more for Mahesh

## My Experience

**Jayashree Rajan**

I, Jayashree Rajan want to share my experiences with you. I was diagnosed with cancer in the year 1991. I am leading almost a normal life. After one and a half years of my marriage, at the age of 22 (with a six months girl child) I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma which is a malignant disease. I was admitted in Adyar Cancer Institute and got myself treated through chemotherapy and radiation. My daughter was taken care of by my mother-in-law during the treatment period. I had been staying at my friend's and cousin's place during the treatment. Throughout the treatment period, I had the support of my mother and husband, both mentally as well as physically. I still remember the support extended by my sisters and cousins. I was treated successfully.

Eighteen years later, I was detected with carcinoma (breast cancer). I underwent surgery and am now under oral medication. We must consult the doctors before it leads to any complications and they will assure your treatment without fail. We should bear in mind that with delay it is likely to spread and this might well prolong the treatment.

In my case no one can tell why this happened to me again. But if we have a positive attitude, we are sure to be cured. Anybody could get this disease, but without delay they should get it diagnosed and must undergo and required treatment.

More than the treatment, scheduled checkups given by the doctor should be done religiously without any break.

Last but not the least I will remember till my last breath, the doctors and nurses at the Institute, for their fullest co-operation and great service.

- A simple narration of a young girl of 22, diagnosed as Hodgkin's disease in 1971 and her return to normal happy life.
- Hodgkin's disease today comes under the category of curable cancers. Early cancers are curable, so is Early Hodgkin disease.
- The advances in the understanding and management of Hodgkin disease have undergone revolutionary changes over the last 2 decades has moved from an era of incurability to curability.
- In 1990 there was only radiation with limited understanding of the biology and natural history of Hodgkin disease. Radiotherapy that was available was primitive.
- Between 1960-80, phenomenal advances in radio therapeutic technology with increasing precision radiotherapy and the advent of chemotherapy changed the scenario of Hodgkin disease from a cure rate of a bare less than 20% prior to 1950, to nearly 80% even in stage III disease today.
- Cure in Hodgkin disease depends on carefully planned scientific treatment.
- One of the long term morbidities of chemo radiation is the potential for a second malignancy
- This however occurs only in about 10% of all cases treated.
- Jayashree's understanding of cancer made it possible to detect early breast cancer in 2010 at a stage what

curative treatment was possible. She is alive and well today leading a happy life with an understanding husband and lovely children.

## **You Can Face It**

**Sumitra Kalyanaraman**

It was the summer of 1994. I had to undergo a D & C test for persistent spotting and occasional excessive bleeding. The biopsy indicated malignancy in the uterus. My whole family was shattered. Further, as the sole earning member of my family my responsibilities were far from complete. Only my elder daughter was married at that time. My second daughter was leaving for the US for higher studies in a week's time; my son – the youngest of my three children – was still in school.

I underwent total hysterectomy via laparoscopic procedure. The biopsy reconfirmed the malignancy in the endometrium ( the inner lining of the uterus) which was classified as Stage I Adenocarcinoma of the Endometrium – the beginning or early stage.

As far as the critical treatment post – hysterectomy was concerned; my elder daughter spoke to several medical practitioners seeking their input. The overwhelming feedback was that the Cancer Institute (WIA) at Adyar was by far the best. We then ran from pillar to post to get an appointment with the Chairman, which we got by the grace of God.

After examination. The first thing she said to me was, ‘your life is not in danger; do not worry. Since the malignancy is in its early stage, I was advised radiation therapy for 4 weeks despite having undergone total hysterectomy. This was to prevent cancerous cells lurking somewhere from spreading to other parts of the body’

During the therapy there were some side effects but I bore it all with grit and determination. My immense faith in Bhagavan Sri Satya Sai Baba gave me the confidence that I was going to be alright at the end of the treatment. After 8 weeks I recovered fully and my doctor advised me to rejoin duty. I cannot describe the feeling of relief, joy and heartfelt gratitude I felt towards the entire team of doctors at the Cancer Institute who were all so caring and affectionate in infusing confidence at every stage of the treatment. I was advised quarterly check-ups in the beginning which later became half-yearly and over th years, annual. Sixteen years after the detection of the disease and the treatment, I am continuing with the check-ups even today. From time to time the checkup is accompanied by other investigations such as ultra sound, mammogram, x-ray, etc.

I am now 72 years old, I served the institution where I was working until the age of 60 and for the past 12 years I have been enjoying retired life, travelling a lot to visit my children and doing service in the Bhagvan Sri Satya Sai organization. All this has been possible because of early detection of cancer and prompt and proper treatment thereof, coupled with the tremendous confidence boosting by my doctor and her team. I am eve thankful to them. I regularly attend the “Reunion Day” and hear a lot about far more serious cancer where the patents have fully recovered and proved that cancer is curable. The cardinal principles one should remember are;



- (1) Do not ignore any unusual growth in your body or symptoms
- (2) Select the right hospital and doctor
- (3) Take the right treatment
- (4) Take regular follow up measures and
- (5) Never lose your confidence.

Your confidence and courage is 50% and treatment the balance 50% .

- A very simple narration of a lady with endometrial cancer who came for treatment in 1994.
- Endometrial Cancer is cancer of the uterus, generally a curable disease if detected early and properly treated.
- The symptoms are simple and easily recognizable. Any abnormal vaginal bleeding either pre or post-menopausal needs immediate attention.
- Women must be aware of this and have a gynecologic consultation.
- Many of the narrations indicate the value of the “Reunion Day” / “Survivors Day”. First / Second Sunday of June every year is observed as a Survivors Day.
- The Survivor day gives an opportunity for survivors to meet and interact with their doctors and other survivors and share their memories or any other problems. It is like a family get together.
- To us, there can be no better ambassadors than survivors to dispel myths about cancer and to spread the message that early cancer is curable and preventable.

## Case History

### Radha Mohan

We introduce ourselves as Mrs.Radha & Mr Mohan happily married in 1985 and have a son. It was a fine morning in 1993 at a remote village in India, when I told him about a small black mole on my right breast. He had a look at it and said it may be a boil and nothing to worry. For a wife, a loving husband's word is more than Veda. After a while we came to Chennai on transfer and in June 1994, again I felt a lump in my right breast. We had consulted our family gynecologist who did a detailed examination of my breast and recommended a mammogram after conducting a "pap smear test" which we conveniently ignored, as we felt we are a good couple from an orthodox Brahmin family and we cannot have such serious complaints.

We had booked a flat in Chennai and were waiting to perform house warming ceremony in May 1995. During the first week of April, I had slight pain, not continuous, in the right breast where the small lump was present and which I'd experienced for the past year. We consulted my husband's company doctor who did a detailed examination of both my breasts and recommended a mammogram to be done immediately. We did the same and then he advised an immediate operation. He recommended us to visit Cancer Institute at Adyar on 14<sup>th</sup> April.

On April 15, 1995, we set off early in the morning and reached the hospital in a hurry as if it was all going to be over the same day. The hospital staff asked us to fill up a form with details of family, food habits, any occurrence of cancer in our family, our normal routine, etc. As we were completing the form, we had a thought within ourselves that I cannot have cancer as I am very sincere, God loving, and God does not give such things to his beloved children especially ME. I was advised to take Needle Biopsy and after a week we were told that it is THAT – "Carcinoma of Right Breast" and that it had reached stage 3.

I was admitted immediately for chemotherapy that afternoon and radiation from the following day. I wanted to be sure so I again requested the doctor to confirm whether she had tested the correct sample or by any chance it got mixed with somebody else's sample. The doctor smiled and confirmed the diagnosis. We did not worry about the cost as that was being met by my husband's company. But we were worried about taking care of my son of 9 years studying in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and we were staying 15 km from Adyar.

My husband asked the duty doctor about the dosage and the name of the ailment – Carcinoma. We did not know that Carcinoma meant Cancer – we even believed that Carcinoma may be another disease and that all is going to be back to normal very soon. Along with chemotherapy, I had to undergo radiation for 21 days. After four cycles of chemotherapy and routine consultation, I was told that an operation is needed and the right breast may be removed – and that it was for my "GOOD".

I had been brooding over this for a long time at the dining table with my son and husband. They are so loving towards me that they wanted ME at the cost of anything else. So I was very happy and felt that I had to live for them. I agreed and the operation was performed on a Tuesday in the month of September 1995. We had requested all our relatives to keep away from visiting us and bringing food. I recovered very fast and I was able to write on a paper in a matter of four / five days. My husband was encouraging. He made me write the list of Diwali garments and crackers for our family. After that, he made me write the lessons for completion of my MA – Public Administration course from University of Madras. My doctor was very happy to see me writing and advised me to continue the same as it would help me return fast to NORMAL LIFE.

After I was discharged, I continued my periodic checkup at regular intervals. Now I have completed 15 years and “Everything is Normal”

Cancer is no longer an ‘UNTREATABLE AND DREADED DISEASE’ ‘PLEASE HAVE POSITIVE ATTITUDE AND CONFIDENCE ON THE DOCTORS’.

- This is the story of Stage II Breast Cancer who is alive and well after 15 years.
- The carry home message is “cancer is not a death warrant”. It is curable in the “early states”. Even in the late stages, curative treatment is possible in over 50% of cases. It needs carefully, planned management at a comprehensive cancer care centre, individualized care and most importantly multidisciplinary approach.
- The three major modalities in therapeutic oncology are surgery, radiation and chemotherapy. One of the major advance in oncologic care of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is multidisciplinary care based on biologic needs of the patient.
- Multimodality approach has made significant changes in the cancer horizon. It has brought many advanced cancers within scope of surgery and curability. All this needs specialty care.

## **My Encounter with Cancer**

**Mahalakshmi Suryanandan**

I am Mahalakshmi Suryanandan, currently living in Tiruvannamalai, near Sri Ramanasramam since 1986 after moving from Delhi, after my husband's retirement.

Here is a short narration of my story with the 'intruder' in my normal life.

One morning in early March 1995, I read in "The Indian Express" excerpts of Dr V Shanta's speech at Tirupathi on breast cancer (symptoms and treatment). It is then that I remembered I had a small red, thickened spot (just like a mole) on my right breast for the past few months, which never bothered me in any way. When my husband also read the news item on cancer, he decided that we should see our family doctor immediately.

The very next day we were at Chennai and were examined by our doctor. He told my doctor sister (a retired Professor of Pharmacology) who accompanied us, not to waste time and to go immediately to the Cancer Institute, Adyar. Of course this was a shock to all three of us.

It was a Saturday and the medical social worker at the Cancer Institute asked me a number of questions about family history, environmental conditions etc., etc., and asked us to meet the doctor on Monday. I met the doctor who was my classmate in college (I had not met her for a long time). After examination she told me that I will need to undergo chemotherapy and surgery etc., after which I would be fine. I being a very nervous person asked her to assure me that I would be fully cured of the disease. She quickly replied, "Mahalakshmi, you know me. I never utter a falsehood. My immense faith in her made me say" then whatever course of action you take, I am prepared to obey and undergo and treatment fully and readily". There the conversation ended.

With an unshakable faith in my doctor and surrender to God, I was admitted in the Cancer Institute on the 10<sup>th</sup> March 1995. Then, I underwent three sessions of chemotherapies each before and after mastectomy (done on May 9<sup>th</sup> 1995) followed by thirty sittings of radiation. The full course of treatment took five months. This was followed by quarterly check-ups for three years, six monthly checkups for the next three years, and then yearly checkups in the Cancer Institute. It is now 15 years and I am hale and healthy (physically and mentally) at the age of 84 and sometimes. I even wonder whether I had cancer at all! It all seems like a dream.

Also, let me confess that in my case, I took the process of undergoing the treatment as a 'sadhana' a practice in my spiritual path and followed it religiously. I firmly believe this attitude and way of thinking gave me the strength to overcome the disease easily and successfully.

Many friends asked me, “why should good people like you get cancer?” I used to reply “It is not a sin or a shameful thing to get cancer. I am in good company with Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Sri Ramana Maharishi”.

The lighter side apart, let us be practical and be aware that cancer like many other diseases, is now curable and also preventable. Positive thinking, family support, faith in your expert doctor and the hospital, and with hope, cheerful frame of mind, patience and last but not the least, by surrendering to the will of God, you are sure to have another span of happy contented, useful and fruitful life. So, face it, fight it and let it flee; and you be free from it forever.

- It is surprising that even the educated public are not aware of the seven danger signals of cancer in India. In any western country, the minute a woman notices a lump in the breast, she will rush to her doctor and request a mammogram. A soft spoken educated lady, a staunch devotee of Shri Ramana Maharishi, Mrs. Mahalakshmi accepted medical advice without question. She had multimodality treatment with chemo radiation followed by surgery and hormones.
- It is apparent in all cancer narrations, that the confidence of the patient in her / his doctor and the family support they get during their treatment plays an important role in their return to normal living.
- This is the psycho social aspect of cancer and today recognized as an important component in oncologic care.

## **A Young Patient Who Fought the Disease**

**Mihir M.Shah**

“Cancer Institute WIA” the name engraved on the granite slab outside the institute was the first thing I noticed when I first entered the institute. I entered wondering why I was being taken there. Do I have Cancer?

Of course at the tender age of 13 it was difficult for me to understand the gravity of the situation, my parents hadn't told me what was wrong with me, nor did I ask what was happening to me and to this date I still don't know why I didn't ask my parents that question. On entering the institute I felt a sudden air of awe at the huge facility. I was not able to believe that the facility was a hospital because I had a picture of a hospital that would be a tall building but the Institute was nothing like it; instead it was a vast area, lots of trees and people moving about, I got the impression that it was more like a resort where people can relax and improve their health. Only on seeing the medical fraternity present I was reminded that this was the “Cancer Institute”. After the necessary paper work for my admission was complete I was admitted at the “Patel Block” where I was greeted by a smiling group of doctors, nurses and support staff. The very same day a team of doctors visited me and spoke to me on how I was feeling, although AI wanted to know more about what was happening to me somehow I was unable to ask them, after such meetings the treatment begun, perhaps the biggest impediment that I faced was to shave my head, although it sounded very trivial I was not able to digest the fact that I had to shave my head and become bald!

Support from my family and the nurses of the institute helped me overcome that impediment. At that point of time I had no understanding of cancer, thus my curiosity got the better of me and instead of cursing my luck as to why this was happening to me, I started questioning the doctors who understood my curiosity and patiently explained my condition to me in simple terms, which although I did not understand fully showed me that the doctors really cared about any questions or problems that the patients had.

By this time a schedule for my treatment was set and the treatment was going on full swing. Every day the duty doctors met me and asked me how I was doing and if there was anything that I wanted to know I could ask them. Another thing that amazed me was that on every Wednesday the Institute's Director greeted my father and myself by our names I could only manage a shaky “Namaste” her compassionate voice reassured me that I felt that I was in safe hands at the Institute. Other doctors such as Dr Sagar and Dr. Ramanan who were supervising my treatment showed a great deal of support and eased the pressure on my family. Dr Ramanan and I were in close contact and on one such occasion we found out that we shared the same birthday and to this day we continue to celebrate it together.

With my treatment in full swing and my body accepting the drugs the doctors were pleased to tell my family and myself that very soon I could go home. During the treatment there were many ups and downs in my health that resulted in discomfort and unusual hours of the day, and at that time the untiring nurses would come to my aid no matter what time it was. Every morning I used to take a walk around the facility to refresh myself. At that time I would meet the watchmen and other supporting staff who would compassionately ask me if I was doing alright and would bless me and would ask me not to strain myself by walking too much.

When I was admitted at the Institute I was in the eight standard and I had not written the eighth standard Annual Exams because of my medical condition and I was certain that I would be detained and have to repeat the eight standard. My parents had called on the Principal of my school to discuss my medical condition and decide my academic standard. My parents did not have any hope that I would get promoted to the next standard. I was overwhelmed with joy when I heard the news and to this day I cannot forget that book I had received for my joy know no bounds . I had never been so happy in my entire life.

The doctors along with the permission to go home also told me that once I am out of the hospital I would have to take extra care of myself. I asked “Will I get the disease again?” They smiled and said we have taken so much effort so that you will never face this problem again but to ensure my well being they gave me certain guidelines that I had to follow which were; periodical check-ups, diet control and avoidance of crowds, and physical strain. With these guidelines they bid me farewell. My treatment was over! The day I was discharged I had smile on my lips as I saw friendly and caring faces with whome I had spent the past four months. Today I have finished my school and college and I am now working for a multinational company. It has been more than seven years since I have been discharged from the Institute, but today, whatever I am – it is because of the support of my family, the doctors, nurses and the support staff of the Institute I shall be forever indebted to al of them.

- Mihir Shah 17 years old was treated for Acute Lymphoblastic Leukamia in 1996. Today it is 16 years after completion of treatment, he is cured.
- Pediatric and adolescent ALLS have come within the scope of curability as a result of the labour and inspiring commitment of pioneers in the field and extensive planned clinical trials.
- Prior to 1960s, there was no cure for leukemia. Today it is a success story. Treatment is with chemo therapy (anty cancer drugs), Cost of drug is high and drugs have to be carefully administered by specially trained medical oncologist. Today Mihir Shah is 33 years old and is part of the family business.
- The Institute has been striving hard to provide the same state of are care to all under priviledged children who seek treatment here.
- Thanks to Mihir Shah and his father who personally contributed whatever they can towards the leukemia care.

## **The Power of Positive Thinking**

**Ramamani Ravi**

What was it that made me suspect such a tiny negligible lump, in spite of my gynecologist ruling out any danger? Can I call it the sixth sense? Or is it Divine Grace that has been guiding me all along? Definitely it is Divine Grace that awakened my sixth sense to this issue/

“Why do you want a further examination?” was my mother’s annoyed voice, not out of ignorance, but out of fear that her daughter may have to go through the same trauma she had undergone 25 years ago. “Amma I must see Dr.Shanta and get it clarified, so that I also live healthy and strong like you” was my reply. But it provided no consolation to her. I was quickly put through the various tests, just to confirm that the lump was an infiltrating duct carcinoma, but at the earliest stage possible. The first question that I asked my doctor was “Dr. Please tell me, how long all this will take? I have to make alternate arrangements for my son’s programs, so that he doesn’t regress”. Doctor’s instantaneous confident reply was “It should be 5 to 6 months, but there is no reason to stop working with your son. You can go on with all your routine activities for your son”. This gave me all the confidence to go through the procedure, months was a definite period and seemed very short, compared to the long journey, we go through together, my son and myself.

### **My Son Who Taught Me A Lesson Of Life**

After my marriage, I did my law and my chartered accountancy, passing out first in the university during all the three years in law, with three gold medals. When I realized that something was not all right with my son, I gave up my professional career in order to create a future for him. He was diagnosed as a child with features of autism. With not much information available then, 17 years ago, but just an intuitive mind and God’s blessings, I can proudly claim that my son has progressed very well in so many areas. But it was with 16 years of struggle, day after day, night after night, for each and every task, that I could proudly say that he is independent. He had to be taught the very basics starting from blinking his eyes. To play, to run, to walk, to talk, to smile when happy, to cry when hurt, shout when angry, above all to identify his mother. Each task had to be broken into 20 or more steps to be introduced to him gradually. But he learnt and learnt well.

When every task had to be put across to him, in pieces, I did it, but now knowing whether he would do it, or whether I am right, or there is any solution to the problem. Having to battle a war against autism is like playing with our eyes blindfolded. Autism has no known cause or cure worldwide, no definite solution or time frame, no answer to the question whether my child will be alright. God made me realize that any problem that has a solution is not a problem at all. This may be a reason for my confidence to face cancer and conquer it.



As far as cancer goes, there are definite tests, a treatment procedure and a definite cure and above all, we have God sent people like Dr Shanta, who has all the required knowledge and experience. Why should I fear it when I just have to hand over myself to her and do as said? There seems to be no confusion, problem or need to worry. Having gone through the tests, I knew that nothing was as painful or dreadful.

### **My Mother As A Role Model For Strength**

I was able to convince everyone in my family with all these explanations, not my mother. She went through a lot of flash back of her experience, which did not seem to pain her then. But the very thought that her daughter had to go through all tormented her. She was my mother, and my mother is the best mother in the world, can say it with conviction, having gone through everything now, to think how she could plait both daughters' hair every day, give them oil baths etc., and live such a wonderful healthy life, that we never even thought of her as a survivor. May be, her desire to do her best for the daughters was the thing that kept going and continues to do so. I am thankful to God for having taken up after her in all these qualities. My topmost priority in bringing my son out of all his problems was what kept me going.

### **My Doctor – The Key Player In Building UP My Confidence**

After three cycles of chemotherapy, 21 days of radiation, the mastectomy and removal of ovaries were successfully done, after which I had two more cycles of chemo. It seems like today. Just a week after my surgery I lay in bed unable to move my left hand to even the slightest fraction of a millimeter. I asked Dr “When can I drive the car in order to take my son for his classes?” Her words, I can never forget as that has kept me going till date. “You can drive home tomorrow”. To me, who could not move my shoulder or hand, it did not seem like a joke, but sounded like a verdict. If Dr. said I could drive home, then I can do it. She cannot be wrong. My unflinching faith in her words made me drive a few months later. Once I could move my hand after six months, I could do all that I did prior to the surgery, better than before. Though I initially used the right hand for the reverse gear, slowly I shifted to the left. By doing all the jobs required for my son and my daily routines, I was unknowingly doing a lot of therapy that in turn did all the good.

Today, where am I?

Five years down the road, can I call myself a survivor? I would be proud to be a conqueror and my mother – the supreme conqueror – a conqueror of all fears, myths that cancer kills and conqueror of cancer, I know that my life is more valuable than before. Hence I must do my best.

Today, I not only work with my son, but also am actively involved in the day to day running of our school for special children, which caters to 65 children. Each day, when we struggle with some child or the other, even the thought of my condition does not seem to pass by. I have been assigned a great mission by God – the lives of special children and their progress. I have to be

strong physically and otherwise in order to stay committed to the cause. It is mainly a state of the mind.

Thinking retrospectively, what was the good that God did in the bargain? The independency level of my son had become far greater, during my treatment period. This joy makes me forget the pains that I underwent. Anything is in how we see it. A cup half full is how an optimist sees it.

What are the factors that have contributed to my good health and success? Is it just the treatment and medication? Or is there something else to it? Yes

- My utmost faith in my doctor and her words
- My burning desire to help my son and other children
- Confidence in my own self
- Above all, that God would always be there with us

Each time I meet doctor during my check up, there is only one question that I ask her, and I ask her the same question even now. “Dr tell me what is the magic that you had done in my surgery. I feel stronger, healthier and more confident than before.” With her usual calm sweet smile, she replied this time, “It is your attitude that has done all this.”

- This story is inspiring in the sense that going through a period of tension and emotional stress gave her strength to see life in a new perspective.
- Her mother had cancer of the breast 5 years earlier when Ramamani was a young girl. Her mother is alive and is well past 80 years.
- Despite her mother’s reluctance to face a diagnosis of cancer in her daughter, Ramamani knew that it was safer to be diagnosed early and be treated, that would enable her to look after her handicapped son.
- A doctor patient relationship is one of total trust and confidence. This is vital in all areas of medicare, especially in oncology. Ramamani’s faith in her doctor was absolute.
- What is positive thinking?

## **I am Healed**

**K Uma Kumari**

I hail from a family of cancer patients. My maternal grand mother's sister died of breast cancer. My maternal aunt, paternal aunt, paternal uncle lost their lives to cancer. Even my first cousin died of breast cancer very recently. My first cousin brother also expired due to this disease during 2006. This is all because they did not get the right treatment.

During the year 1995, I found a small lump in my left breast which was hard. Even without consulting any doctor I concluded that it must be a malignant tumour. At that time my mother who was above 80 years old was seriously sick, and hence I did not reveal this to her as I felt it may cause mental agony. Moreover after seeing my family, members, who suffered a lot during the treatment, I firmly decided not to undergo any treatment. My mother who suffered from his disease had drawn her last breath on December 28<sup>th</sup> 1997.

After my mother's death I informed my sisters and elder brother about the lump. They accompanied me to Chennai in January 1998. After conducting all investigations the institute confirmed that the tumour was malignant. I was directed to meet Dr Shanta . But I still did not feel like taking the treatment. However my family took me to the cancer institute. There I saw a pool of patients with smiling faces. After interacting with them, I felt I was in a safe place.

When my name was called, I met the doctor and she explained to me about the treatment plan and that I would definitely have a better quality of life. This gave me a feeling of being protected by God.

On 03.02.1998 I was admitted in the hospital for chemotherapy. At the time of admission the lump size was 5 x 3 cms. After 3 cycles of chemo, miraculously the size reduced to a negligible size. As I was working as HOD Mathematics and Computer Science in a Degree College in A.P. about 800 kms from Chennai, I rushed to my duty after my first chemo. I never had any difficulty to travel or to attend my duty. My students and my family members are very thankful to the cancer institute, especially the doctors and staff.

After chemotherapy, I had radical mastectomy. I was also put through radiation both before and after the operation, I never felt any pain or any uneasiness during this treatment.

During 2002 I visited my brother in USA. He took me to Birmingham Women's hospital, an affiliate of Harvard Medical School for a consultation. On seeing my case history, the doctors at the hospital confirmed that I had been given the best treatment. This gave me a lot of confidence that we are getting world class treatment at the Cancer Institute.

It is 12 years since my treatment now after my retirement I am healthy and looking after an agricultural firm in a village and leading a healthy life.

Experience of a well-educated 58 years lady with a family history of breast cancer treated in 1998.

The risk of women with a family history of breast cancer is significant, more than those who do not have a family history. Family history of breast cancer occurs in about 10% of patients.

This stresses the importance of a more vigilant screening of women with a family history than that needed by those without a family history

The susceptibility gene has been identified and is called BRCA1 and BRCA2. Women with a strong family history of breast cancer have the option to have gene testing and if present have preventive action.

Annual breast cancer screening significantly increases early detection and thus improves survival

The risks for breast cancer are – nulliparity, age over 30 years at 1<sup>st</sup> child birth, use of hormones, obesity, high cholesterol diet, family history of breast, ovary, endometrium or colo rectal cancers.

## **A Haven of Hope**

**Sr. Celine Paul FMM**

**“The Lord is my Shepherd, there is nothing I shall want”**

**“He keeps me in the palm of His hand and I am protected and secured in His arm”**

Five years have passed since I was diagnosed with Cancer of the Ovary which was operated on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1998 at the Cancer Institute, Adyar, Chennai.

Recalling those days of uncertainty I was reminded of the verse from the Holy Bible, St. Mark Ch 9 Vs.23, “All things can be done for the one who believes,” which was a soothing balm to my aching heart and spirit.

My vivid memory brings home to me the first time that I met my doctor who rekindled courage and hope in me. She scanned through the reports (given from a Private Hospital where I was investigated) very carefully and explained to me that I needed more investigations immediately. She also explained to me that I had to undergo surgery and further line of treatment that would follow. Her kind and encouraging words gave me much comfort and relief and I felt that the Lord had entrusted her with the responsibility of caring for me.

However, I must admit that dark moments of conflicts and confusion through which I had to sail during those moments I felt that I was sailing through a turbulent sea and my ‘life boat’ was caught up in the upsurge. There were difficult moments when I had to make hard decisions of subjecting myself to various investigations and the line of treatment I should say that I was given ample time to decide and respected my decision. Anxieties and doubts troubled me as to whether to go through such ordeals. Those moments when I was gripped with the fear of disease and its consequences, I was reminded of the following verse, “it is with the heart one sees rightly, what is essential is invisible to the eye”, and I could also add, “Heart has its own reason that even reasoning mind cannot understand”. The Lord God is in control of my entire life and He brings me peace and tranquility at difficult moments.

Selfless services in the form of efficient care and keen personal interest rendered by the doctors, nurses and all members of the team I have met, during my stay in the hospital and Health Review Visits at the Institute for the past Five Years have impressed me very deeply.

I am convinced of this. “It is not earthquake that controls the advents of a different life but storms of generosity and vision of incandescent souls” that instill enthusiasm and new horizon if hope.

What tremendous patience one has to exercise in the midst of hundreds of patients who come from far and near for treatment with shattered dreams of life!! The Institute has equipped itself all along there FIFTY YEARS with advanced scientific technology and other facilities necessary both for the patients and their relatives to make their stay profitable safe and comfortable.

As the institute celebrated FIFTY GOLDEN YEARS of its Noble and Sacred Service to the suffering humanity, we, the beneficiaries of the great institution of International Fame are greatly indebted to the management, the authorities and dedicated staff and congratulate them and implore God's choicest blessing upon each of them.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizen can change the world, indeed it's the only thing that ever has".

CONGRATULATIONS!

GOD BLESS THIS SACRED TEMPLE OF HEALING AND THE HEALERS

- Ovarian cancers are generally considered unfavourable in outlook since early detection is difficult. They are unlike breast and endometrial cancers where early detection is easy.
- The symptoms are vague and the tumor grows insidiously. Vague abdominal discomfort, unaccounted abdominal pain should alert any woman around the age of 40 and above to seek medical advice.
- It will thus be necessary to be well aware of the signs and symptoms of cancer to enable the individual to seek medical help in time.
- Breast, Ovary and endometrial cancers have a familial predisposition .
- Early ovarian cancers carry a good prognosis. With proper treatment it has a survival of over 90%. But in late stage ovarian cancers, the outlook is not so favourable despite significant advances in chemotherapeutics.
- Total confidence in God helps tide over many periods of emotional and stressful periods in one's life.
- Sr.Celine Paul was a teacher – now retired. The nuns all over Tamil Nadu have a close association with the Institute . We are happy to be of service to them.

## Story

**Nalini**

On 15<sup>th</sup> January 1998 at the Cancer Institute, Adyar, Chennai I was diagnosed with breast cancer. A shattering shock it was for me, my family and friends as I was a fighting fit female not prone to even minor infections with regular attendance right through school, college and workplace.

At the first meeting my Doctor adorned the ordering of a ring which luckily was an exact replica of my short boys crop. With the active support of my doctor and her colleagues at the hospital, the emotional support of my wonderful husband, family and in-laws I was able to undergo the six strong doses of chemotherapy. As the skin get burnt badly and peeled off I was only given 16 out of 20 radiations and the third chemo postponed for a couple of days.

My ten year old daughter was left to my sister's and mother's case at Bangalore, where I am from. After my third chemo in early March I returned to Bangalore coming to Chennai every 3 weeks for the next 3 doses.

Thanks to the prayers of all my well-wishers and good care of my in-laws and close family members not forgetting the hospital staff I was declared fit to take a month break from the last chemo in mid-May. The operations, mastectomy and Overiectomy, were scheduled for 23<sup>rd</sup> June. During the pre-op medical tests the blood tests reports showed a soaring blood sugar caused by stress and the tumor. For quick sugar control I got admitted to a reputable Diabetic Hospital for two days before being readmitted for the rescheduled operations date of 25<sup>th</sup> June.

All went off well with sugar levels coming to normal two days later. After a further two days in the surgical ward with doctors, and cancer support group volunteers to cheer you up, I was shifted to the regular hospital ward. A week of regular visits from the doctors dietician, physiotherapist friends, relatives and well-wishers.

As my pathology report was a good one, I was discharged on July 4<sup>th</sup> with no further treatment till my first post OP review a month later. I volunteered to be a part of The Atlas Clinical Trials and took an anti-cancer drug tamonifeu for the next 4 years and eight months.

I was asked to check in I M R radiation at my first review in early August, four weeks of 20 doses of radiation I spent in shuttling between Chennai Monday to Friday, Bangalore at the weekends. My husband who was with me throughout the previous treatment and operation time now stayed at Bangalore with our daughter and mother.

I was discharged in early September and went back to my job and home. I had my normal life again forgetting the minor discomforts of post-operative infection at the sites of the operation in July and lymphedema in my right arm which persists even today after 9 years.

I returned for a checkup every three months for three years then once in 6 months for the next two years. I have been coming annually for investigation and review since 2003 and have been given a clear chit on 23<sup>rd</sup> August this year.

God is in His Heaven and all is right with my world thanks to my doctor and her colleagues. God Bless them.

- Every narration of an encounter with a diagnosis of cancer is almost the same; fear as to what is in store, fear for the family, fear of disfigurement and many others. This is essentially lack of awareness of the progress in cancer management and that cancer is not a death sentence.
- Another significant observation in these stories is the need for family support but as importantly the doctor patient relationship which has to be one of total trust and confidence. This can make all the difference in ones attitude to the disease.



## Story

**Karpagam Sundaram**

“Lord where were thee, when I needed thee most?”

“Son, I was there within thee, carrying thee on these two, my shoulders”.

-Ramakrishna Paramahansa

I wondered why they had labeled the disease Cancer. When the disease hit my sister ten years back, and me now. I understood the aptness of the name, since, like the monster crab that it is, there is no rhyme, reason or logic to the path in which or the speed with which, the cancer burrows its way into the system. The first thought on even a suspicion of being affected by it is “Will I survive this? How far and wide and how fast has the monster spread?” The second most worrying is, “How are my kith and kin going to take it a second time” Close and old ones who will see the suffering of undergoing the treatment; the younger ones waiting miles away for the daily reports and prognosis, especially if two of them are in the medical field.

In my case it started as an accidental discovery of a lump in my right breast when I was idly trying to test for the source and origin of what seemed a cramp in my upper right arm. Even as I felt the lump as big as a good sized gooseberry and no pain on palpating it, I had a suspicion that I was in for trouble in a big way, especially since my sister had a hysterectomy for the same problem exactly ten years back.

I already knew from personal and secondary experience that the only route of MINIMUM RISK and MAXIMUM ADVANTAGE was the Cancer Institute. I particularly requested for, and was lucky enough to be entrusted to the care of Dr V Shanta, Chairman of the Institute. My first consultation with her was on 27<sup>th</sup> Nov 2000. After a preliminary examination she gave it as her frank opinion that there was a good sized tumour which could turn out benign or malignant and therefore I would be put through a series of tests, further to which a program of treatment would be charted out. What I most admire and am thankful for, was the way in which she talked to me, infusing and instilling so much confidence in me that I could already feel that she and her team had already rallied around me to start the marathon fight in winning over the monster. Incidentally after the tests I came to know that my tumour was a 2cm x 2 cm x 1.8 at the 11 o’ clock position with no axillary nodes and in the upper quadrant, well circumscribed.

Actually the real seriousness of the situation hit me only when I was made to run the gamut of what seemed innumerable and interminable tests; EGC, X-ray of Chest, mammogram, FNAC (which I understood was the determining factor for the malignancy or otherwise of the tumour). C T Scan of the chest, bone scan, blood tests including GTT (from which I came to know that cancer per se could have caused a glucose intolerance to me) ultra sound of pelvic region covering the uterus, liver, kidney, gail bladder, etc., pap smear of the vagina.

My reviews with Dr Shanta and my interaction with her team of specialists in the various fields, who include Dr Vijaya, Dr Selvi, Dr. Sarojini, Dr Balasubramanian, Dr Krishna Kumar, Dr Ramanan and others fed me quite a lot of information. I came to know the immediate route the cancerous cells may take, the lymph, nodes, the chest wall, the uterus, kidney, the blood. And being a maths person myself, I was able to understand and appreciate the elimination process taken to reject the unrequired areas of treatment; to clinically stage and target the area of treatment, the charting of the necessary cycles of chemotherapy and the amount of radio therapy required, the blood tests involved to keep my system under constant check.

Dr Vijaya and Dr Rohini practically walked me through the 10 days of radiotherapy of 200 rads each day. I even had a breast mould to target the radiation to an accuracy of 90% and was informed that I was given cobalt ray treatment.

Dr Ramanan, Dr Ramanujam and Dr Sanjay Piplani took care of my chemo cycles.

On 9<sup>th</sup> Jan 2001 after my chemo cycle II, Chairman Dr Shanta with her anesthetist and her team performed segmental mastectomy of my right breast and removal of my axillary nodes. Today is the eleventh day of my surgery and with the lymphatic drain, almost completed and the therapeutic exercises of the arm I am very proud and glad to say that I am back to my normal energetic cheerful self. I have finished my 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle of chemotherapy yesterday 18<sup>th</sup> January 2001.

The long drawn out process of treatment has given me an opportunity to observe the workings of the several departments of the hospital and to interact with staff, nursing sisters, and doctors and more important with patients worse affected than me and more traumatic. I would like to share my feelings and thoughts and with all of you and anybody else who might care to read this rambling thoughts.

- My very dear friends, I was surprised to see that all of you, I was not just a case, but a real person with all the natural fears and worries and doubts normally associated with the disease. I saw and felt every one of you doing your bit with utter dedication encouraging me every slip of the way with kind gestures and words, fighting my disease side by side with me. A VERY BIG THANK YOU, though I know that doesn't cover what I have to say.
- The very pillar of the institution, the chairman Dr V Shanta has my deepest gratitude and fullest respect. I found a very human doctor in her, with utmost consideration for every one of her patients, deeply loving and for every one of her patient, deeply loving and caring, extremely dedicated to her profession, perfectly methodical and systematic, leaving absolutely nothing to chance. Her patience and understanding of the mental trauma of a patient, which makes her descend down to answering even some of the

silliest questions of a worried patient, has to be seen to be believed. Her capacity to instill and infuse confidence in a patient is par excellence. All I can say is Ma'am God Bless You. I can't find the correct and enough words to thank you.

- Every move has to be made by the patient to any department including the attending doctor through the PRO Mr Ramani. To me, in a nutshell, Mr Ramani is an encyclopedia and a computer rolled into one. His calm facet and his attention to details in all his dealings, and his calm replies to queries amidst a sea of pressure is something admirable, something fantastic.
- My very special thanks to Dr Vijaya the radiation oncologist for her very kind special and caring attention throughout the ordeal. I thank Dr Selvi too for her kind and detailed attention she showed to me in all surgical matters.
- I see zillions of cases coming in every day to the institute from all walks of life – literate as well as illiterate, the rich and poor the not so rich and the not so poor, period with no knowledge of the disease or those with little knowledge and lot of hearsay; kids months old with blood cancer; middle aged people with cancer of the lung, mandible, blood, throat, tongue; In fact I have not only understood but seen the damage that the monster could cause anyone, anywhere, anytime mindlessly and without reason. I have personally seen the affected people being cheered on life, by all of the staff. A truly great work. I think we should leave it sine it is said wit such sincerity.

I went in with a lot of fear and doubts and worries. I come out very chastised, with a tremendous respect for the dedicated thoughtful, methodical, efficient kind and caring services of the noble doctors and the nursing staff and attendants, who have and are still giving their unstinted services to relive a lot of pain that mankind is suffering . Bless them. Bless their services and bless the Institute.

- The name cancer was derived from the Greek word Karkos (crab) which is translated as cancer.
- Just like a familial predisposition in breast cancers which occurs in 10% of cases, familial predisposition is also seen in breast, endometrium, ovarian and colo rectal cancers.
- The patient under reference had early disease and was suitable for breast conservation and therefore had what is termed as "Breast Conservation Surgery" where only part of the breast along with axillary glands are removed.
- Breast conservation surgery ( comes under the category of organ conservation) and represents a truly major advance in oncologic cars. It has substantially improved quality of life without compromising on survival.
- Organ conservation can be considered and be successfully only in early disease. It can be undertaken only where there is a multidisciplinary team under the same roof; It should not be undertaken by a non-specialist group.

## **Entered III Returned Well**

**Dr Mrs B Selvam**

I am an obstetrician and gynaecologist practicing at Trichy. It was a Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> August 1999. I was with my beloved daughter in Coimbatore for admitting her in PSG College of Technology. While casually chatting with her, I noticed a painful small swelling in my right breast. I realized – I am getting entangled. I suspected it to be cancerous growth. After leaving my daughter in the hostel, I went for Surgeons' opinions. FNAC which confirmed the same – DUCT CELL CARCINOMA.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1999 on the advice of my family friend Dr Keishnakumar, I met the Chairman of the Cancer Institute, Adyar who confirmed the disease. The words she spoke to me are still ringing in my ears. "You have cancer. You have come fairly early. The medical science is advancing day by day. We are able to give good results. But above all, your positive attitude and cooperation with us are going to do wonders and really relieve you from the disease and bestow longevity. I expect you to overcome the malady with confidence and courage.

Leaving everything in the hands of Almighty and Madam, I went through the investigations, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, followed by surgery. When my whole family was shedding tears, I was moving about undeterred with all positive thoughts, hopes and plans about my recovery and future, religiously following the treatment protocol. When many of my colleagues raised queries about the delay in my surgery, I stuck on faithfully to Institutes schedule. I defiantly faced the chemotherapy and radiotherapy with minimal discomfort, thanks to the individualized specific therapy plan.

On 28<sup>th</sup> Dec 1999, I underwent the surgery successfully and joined the whole world joyfully welcoming the millennium – 2000. From then on,. I carry out my duties as a mother of 2 children, as an obstetrician and gynecologist as before or even better so.

Seven years have gone. Thanks to the follow up and reviews of Madam, my medical report reads thus:-

No reactivation

No recurrence

No spread

I am living a life with all physical and mental fitness fulfilling the demands expected of me in my profession and family. Above all, I am blessed to witness my loving daughter's wedding shortly.

Many many thanks to the Almighty and my doctor and her team for giving me this productive life.

- A young practicing gynecologist, 34 years old was seen in 1999.
- Being a medical professional, she could recognize early disease and reported for treatment without delay and could be treated by breast conservation surgery. The stress today in treatment and cure of cancer is not just cure but quality of life.
- Organ conservation is a major advance of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and breast conservation treatment in eligible cases has brought tremendous happiness to breast cancer patients.
- This is possible only in specialized cancer centers practicing multimode therapy.

## My Story

**Anonymous**

I was born to parents both of whom came from big families of which remarkably few were long-lived. Most died before 50, mysteriously or of tuberculosis. In the backward villages of Kerala of their youth, un-electrified and untouched by modern medicine, people were extraordinarily fatalistic and resigned themselves to what they saw as their karmic illnesses.

By the time I grew up in Bangalore and received a “modern” education, (1960s) a parade of relatives in need of medical attention had moved through our home. Some of them received treatment successfully. Some never recovered. That one could actually live to be quite old, without falling ill, never entered my consciousness so when both my parents died of cancer, one at 48 and the other at 61, I took it for granted that I too didn’t have much time left to raise my children, see them settled, publish the books I wanted to, and change the world before I left for the great Upstairs. I take this inability to see myself as an old woman – living for years and years – and has something to do with my philosophical and probably casual attitude to money and possessions.

I married into a family of doctors and rationalists who – except for my father in law – saw no purpose in philosophy or the esoteric side of life. When I began to study Vendanta in my 30s I was in a minority of one. But those years were some of the happiest I have known. Vedanta strengthened me enormously. Many of my fears fell away and I was able to work and manage my relationships with an equanimity that I am sure I was not naturally heir to. It also fitted with my instinctive conviction that nothing in life lasted very long and indeed it simply wasn’t worth making a fuss about many trivial things that most people gave a great deal of importance to.

So although – given my family history – an annual check was on the cards, I made up my mind never to seek treatment if I ever fell victim to the illness that had harvested many people in my family. What was the use of becoming depressed through treatment and dying later rather than sooner? I had watched both parents become unlike themselves before submitting to Fate. I decided I would not only not look for help but wouldn’t even announce the problem should it ever appear.

It did

Exactly as I had known it would.

I had waited for it from the time I was 40. It was no surprise and almost a relief when I sensed its presence in early 2000. I was 40. For twenty months I kept it entirely to myself. If ever anyone anticipated this disease and practically invited it and waited for it unemotionally it was I and this is the first thing I have to share. Exactly like many other things in life, you can make something

happen by dwelling on it and keeping your mind open to it. Of course, to be sure, there must have been a genetic component too but the working of the mind is as silent and as effective.

Since that year – 2000 – was also the worst year I had faced professionally. I would like to share a second conviction. One of the areas of cancer research is the many causes of the disease – smoking, too much liquor etc. But my theory is about emotional pain and ones inability to absorb and endure it. That year and the twenty-odd months preceding it formed a time when the office I had to joyfully worked in for nearly half my life became an inferno of betrayal and ill-treatment. I have often felt that the unresolved tensions and the emotional shock of friends turning tormentors had a lot to do with the anxiety that eventually brought on the Cancer.

Of course, if I had been a truly successful student of Vedanta, I would have surfed those choppy waters too but I lacked the intelligence, patience and strength of mind. Finally it was my attitude and temperament and inability to reconcile myself to the injustice of changed circumstances that led to a situation of extreme and continuous stress.

I brought it on myself

I didn't protect my mind enough

The mind can play havoc with the body

At the end of the year 2000, when I derailed myself from the position I had held for 20 years it was like locking away a relationship that had lasted nearly a quarter of a century. At the next eventful and happy year in my new work place (2001) drew to its end, I realized that my left breast was hardening. There were twinges I could no longer ignore. I felt a drilling that began in my back at the shoulder bone and worked itself through my chest or breast, I could never be quite sure. I would like to say that at this point, although I guessed the truth, felt absolutely no fear. What used to bother me was how long I could suppress the truth.

A wedding in the family gave me the excuse to postpone my annual checkup and mammogram. Eventually I did go for it in Jan 2002. The technician's face was expressionless as she asked me "How long has this part of your breast been so hard?"

Event to me it felt like leather.

"For about six months" I replied

The result for which I waited a day said, "Thickening of nipple, no rumour, advised a mammogram once in six months".

Was it...could it possibly be – something else? When I took the pictures to Safinaaz, my elegant and sympathetic doctor friend she said, "Well, apparently there is nothing but I'd like you to see an oncologist anyway". The next day, the 18<sup>th</sup> day of Jan 2002, as I sat with my daughter in the waiting room, I said to her morosely, "This is my last happy day".

When the specialist, Dr Uma Krishnaswamy asked about my family history, suddenly there flashed upon my inward eye, the picture of my mother's too youthful face as she lay dying. I even saw the shadow the bedstead had thrown on the wall of the room in the nursing home where we had lost her 30 years ago. What a good thing she wasn't around @ God! That long haul, was it now my turn?

If you are lucky the biopsy will show a slow cancer. In any case I would advise either slicing off the nipple for a really thorough investigation, or a mastectomy to be absolutely sure of removing the diffuse tumour. Because that is what I think you have". Dr Uma was kind quite clear. " I don't know how the radiologist missed seeing the diffusion a year ago and picked it up only now.!"

She sent me to the Apollo Specialty where Dr Bhagyam did an excruciatingly painful biopsy. The result would take two days but that evening, as I had my usual evening drink seated on the verandah. I was certain what the final diagnosis would be. Just before I went to Delhi we knew for sure, Grade II, in-duct carcinoma. Just before I took my return flight home, I heard that the hormone tests were positive. I took so many sleeping pills to get through the night that I nearly missed my flight home the next day which was Sunday, 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb when we visited Dr Sreedevi, a bright young doctor who worked in the Cancer Institute. She discussed everything with me and smiled. "You are the only person in the 300 or so I've met who has not wanted to rush into surgery.

Meanwhile there was a trouble at work. My colleague who co-managed my department fell before the axe of retrenchment. Oddly, the trouble turned to my advantage. As my department had virtually disappeared I could work from anywhere as long as I kept my deadlines. So working at home became the natural thing to do, visiting the office only once or twice a week. It suited the long treatment that stretched ahead of me.

It was at this time that my daughters, husband and I took decision not to announce the illness. I wanted to keep it completely secret. I particularly did not want my profession to know. So apart from very close family members no one ever knew how ill I was. It suited my nature to not draw attention to my woes. I had stood virtually dry-eyed as my Mother and Father had slipped out of my life. I was a woman of tremendous discipline and I slammed down the whole machinery of control on my life. My plan was --- if I acted normal, I would soon be just that. I never once broke down or wailed for attention or sympathy. Supported by a good staff I ran the house, I planned my work from home. I kept up with friends and reading even celebrated our 29<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary with a tiring party a few days after my last chemotherapy when I was feeling decidedly weak.

But let me not run ahead of my story.....



On 4<sup>th</sup> February 2002, I met Dr V Shanta for the first time. If ever a doctor had achieved the status of a legend in her lifetime, it was She. She was also one of the few doctors whom my late and formidable mother in law had approved of. I instantly felt not only a great confidence, a burst of wellness and a completely irrational conviction that I would recover, but also some sense of recognition – that Dr. Shanta was someone I was destined to meet./ From that moment forth, I never once felt sorry for myself or afraid of the future.

My husband and I sat down in her cluttered and badly-lit office room. Here was someone who was too busy saving lives to bother about the plastic flowers and silver trophies that stood around her awkwardly almost as if they didn't know what they were doing there. Her voice was so soft I had to strain to hear her. She explained that the usual programme would be surgery followed by treatment of various kinds. Possibly radiation, possible chemotherapy. She wanted to do her own tests to confirm and cross-check the Apollo Specialty findings.

The FNAC was extremely painful and Dr Sukumaran was infuriatingly cheerful as he said “Oh bear up – it's only a tiny prick. It was many piercings and they were not tiny. They followed waits outside rooms where I was x-rayed, bone-scanned, and ultra-sound for further signs of the lurking monster. Luckily only my left breast was affected.

Three days later with all the results before her, Dr Shanta told me and my husband that though her tests didn't show exactly what the Apollo Specialty did, she thought that I should have a mastectomy – partial or more could be decided by and by – with more treatment upon examination of the excised portions. I asked her if there was a route other than surgery? No, she said, none that she would recommend as heartily as surgery. Then I told her that I didn't want surgery. That I felt I couldn't live with disfigurement, that if my karmic clock was winding down, I didn't want to interfere in it too strongly.

My friend Dr Lakshmi who had called around told me that every single person she consulted had advised surgery and I was nervous as I placed my suggestion before Dr Shanta.

“If I'm not destined to finish the work I feel I was meant to do I don't think it is any use going through any kind of treatment.” I said to Dr Shanta explaining my theory of medicine, time and karma, when the purpose of life was over, the disintegration would begin. “If you have really absorbed the message of the veda, you can even enjoy the fall of your own body my guru had said ten years ago. I didn't say the second part of the theory but wove the first part in to my answer.

The great surgeon was astonishingly supportive

“We believe that the consent and mental attitude of the patient is vital in the healing process but I can give you the time you need to finish your work. Think about taking the suggested course of treatment.

We met four days later on 8<sup>th</sup> February.

“Well, what have you decided? asked Dr Shanta

“Have there been recoveries after just radiation and chemotherapy? “ asked my husband, a child of parents in whose time the doctor’s words was the last one.

“Yes, there have been people who went away convinced they were going to be well.”

“I would like to try that option first, I ventured”.

“All right but I would need a statement from you saying it is by your knowledge and choice”.

I wrote out a letter / statement and was told to report for the first chemotherapy session on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 2002.

My sister-in-law who is really more a friend than a SIL accompanied me to the first chemotherapy session and to all the five others. I remembered that it was she who accompanied me into the labour room when my second child was born and thought to myself rather grimly, may be she will see me off too – clearly she had a leading role in my life! Dr Ramanan who counseled me briefly said, “you know you’ll lose your hair and when you look back, you will feel a loathing for everything you did or ate or wore at this time.” As the needles were inserted and the healing poisons began to enter it felt like liquid fire raging all over inside. Terrible though it was, it lasted only a minute before the palliatives rushed in and right through those three hours or so, I felt as if I had had a stiff whiskey. I was floating and didn’t suffer the frightening and demoralizing reactions of the kind some others did.

Six such rounds during which time I lost half my hair and nearly all my eyebrows. What surprised me was that no one noticed. Either people’s powers of observation were poor or I didn’t suffer the disfigurement that patients who usually undergo this same treatment do. I grew pale staying indoors. I couldn’t eat too heartily. With menopause induced overnight and chemically, I burned all over from time to time.

There were a number of minor irritations including blurred vision but what alarmed me most of all was the loss of memory. I simply couldn’t remember if it was a Monday or a Thursday. Blessed as I had been for years with a startlingly powerful memory this was really upsetting.

Then I read that after her chemotherapy, an American woman had once placed the kitchen sponge in the oven instead of the chicken and astonished her family at dinner-time. So...,it was normal!

The other aspect of my treatment was radiation of the affected breast. Every morning for 20 days I lined up with a number of other outpatients to be irradiated in a large and gloomy room. The clerks at the door were matter of fact and Dr Vijaya the radiologist a walking encouragement. Will I ever forget that iron screen and the green gowns? Up on to the table, to be arranged like a doll under the big fittings before everybody left and the great lead-sealed doors closer with a faint boom. Like all the others I lay still for the specified number of minutes. Again I drove off feeling only a faint tingling except when the skin began to fall apart and I felt a difficult to describe scorching feeling; like being burned from the inside. Dr shanta explained that I could bathe but not scrub myself down. I was measured for a bracket or brace which was fitted before I was given a dose every day. Gradually the skin turned dark, the area blistered and grew painful. "Don't move around, lie down as much as you can," said Dr Vijaya who was for stopping the radiation.

"She is getting the maximum doctor...." I heard her say to Dr. Shanta.

"That is okay. We will deal with the breakdown but right now I want to chase the cancer", Dr Vijaya prescribed a wonderful ointment. The name escapes me now. It was so cheap and was an extract form papaya. It helped the blistering and pain.

I enjoyed talking with my fellow patients. We shared something Cancer the great leveler. They came from all over and some of them were very poor. What they all had in common was depression. I did my best to cheer up a Stella Marie. She had a certain morbid preoccupation with sin that Christianity manages to instill in its followers; she was sure she had done something to upset her God. I told her that cancer was not God's punishment, it was much easier to get over cancer than it was to survive a heart attack, pancreatitis or failed kidneys. I deliberately wore bright clothes to the O P and used lipstick...something I didn't usually do. I managed to get her to be more cheerful and optimistic. I wished I could do some sort of counseling but of course it called for special training.

Luckily I had plenty of work to keep me occupied and my secretary and I met twice a week in the office to keep the pace of paperwork going without disruption. But bouts of weakness and lassitude interrupted. Meetings and discussions were curtailed and I began to miss not working at the 100 kmph pace I had got used to. Having identified myself with a routine which took me out of myself and into the development of other peoples' creativity I suddenly found myself faced with a depression I had never had to tackle before. By nature given to a melancholy I thought I had overcome with Vedanta, I came face to face with spiritual failure. Was it the chemicals? I

almost felt as if my identity was under challenge. This feeling lasted for nearly a year during which time India turned upside as the country looked at itself in the mirror of Gujarat. Everything changed in that short span of time. I always link three things after which life has never been the same. Gujarat, The world Trade Centre bombings. My altered health.

However, I have something else to say. Dr Ramanan had said that I would look back on my treatment time with horror. Nothing of the kind happened. For me it was a period of self-discovery. Everything slowed down, I had time to introspect, I found out who my real friends were, who was really concerned by my absence in various for a and I learnt to count my blessings and stop grumbling about inconsequential things. It was a voyage of introspection and for the first time, I saw myself in the proper perspective and not through a cloud of vanity and grandiose self-importance. I was just like everybody else. Only luckier. Much , much luckier. I still have some of the clothes I wore at that time. I've kept my old diaries and scribble pads, and my OP card I cherish like one would a medal.

In September 2002 when Rupa Publishers released Kumar's The Joy of Cancer, I sat by Dr Shanta. The governor an ex-DGP swept into his speech, "This scourge of a disease..." he said and Dr Shanta disagreed silently but vigorously , "No no" she said and added to e, "People like you should speak up.." It too felt like writing or speaking about it but I had kept quiet for too long.

Every three months, then every six months, I went for rounds of tests. I saw again the look of apprehension on the faces of new patients. The look of absent-minded calm on the faces of old patients. The painful mammogram, the abdominal scans, the chats with doctors as their smiles broadened. "We discussed your case... how it just disappeared." Said Dr Sarojini some two years ago. I was Dr. Shanta's success story and I count myself among the chosen who are given a new lease of life. First with Tamoxifen then with Letroze, it managed my after-cancer life feeling only a little more tired than used to before the incident. No one can predict the future or whether the intimate enemy will stage a comeback but for now, I am a cancer survivor.

What had I leaned from it? That we carry our medial destiny in ourselves as we do the color of eyes and texture of skin and hair. That there are kind people everywhere, that the entire complexion of life can change in a matter of hours. I remember I used to look at people around me in the office or on the road and think, "Non of these people has cancer. They take their hair and health for granted." I learnt that there are people who have dedicated their whole lives to taking care of people who fall to this frightening disease. Journalists are fond of saying "Communalism is the cancer of society" or the "Cardiac arrest of society"? For generations the word cancer has brought with in the knock of death on one's door. "Have you heard? She has cancer..". is somehow like saying, "Have you heard she is dying?".

There is life after cancer.

There is life during cancer-time itself.

- This is an extremely interesting narration of an individual's encounter with breast cancer. A highly educated lady with a wide spread of medical professionals around her. Yet failed to have a rational approach to disease and believed in karma – whether she expected the arrival of cancer as part of karma or awareness of the higher risk in a family like hers is not clear. Nor was she aware of the phenomenal advances in technology and scientific knowledge that had changed the cancer scenario / horizon over the last 4 decades.
- Today breast cancer does not mean loss of life or loss of breast.
- The options for the patient with breast cancer are many. Breast conservation surgery is the major advance of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Breast conservation without surgery is yet another option, not so extensively tried.
- When many options are available, these are always pros and cons. Evidence based data helps but individual experience is as important.
- In breast cancer, successes are more than failures provided it is handled by a multidisciplinary team in a specialty setting.
- Ultimately it is the gene that decides. This is not fatalistic because it is expected that with gene profiling many of our unanswered questions will be answered and doubts cleared.
- The narration also throws open innumerable area for discussion like the close link between the mind and the body, stress and disease, stigma and cancer and many others. Every one of these is under intensive studies world over.
- Yes, there is life after cancer. It is not the end. It is the beginning.

## Down Memory Lane

Gracey Varghese

July 7, 2002, a day of mixed feelings – on the one side – brimming with happiness because it was the day on which my son started his professional course and on the other side, depressed because it was also the day I was diagnosed with breast cancer, For a moment the world collapsed around me and I could see myself being pushed into the deepest and darkest part of the earth – fear gripping my every part my dreams for my son and the life ahead came crashing down like a ton of bricks. I asked the same question which most people did – God why me? And then tears broke out like the floodgates had opened. The doctor let me cry. My husband who was with me was equally shattered but he tried to be brave as I could see him pushing back the tears from his eyes.

After I reached home, I sent up a silent praying asking God that I wanted to live for my husband and son and I could hear His voice asking me to trust Him and that it what I did after that and I did get an inner strength which I cannot explain. From that time onwards just wanted to conquer the disease and come out victorious. So there I was at the Cancer Institute (a place I would avoid looking at as I pass it every day on my way to work) being put through a plethora of investigations which reconfirmed that I had ductal carcinoma – stage 2 (which I was told is an early stage and is curable – Thank God). I was advised two cycles of chemotherapy. I was told that the treatment would have its side effects like loss of hair, mouth ulcers, nausea etc., etc., which was written in black and white on a sheet of paper which I signed blindly. All this while, I just had my family for support and God above was answering my prayers – I did not have any of the side effects for which I had put my signature to – Neither did I loose hair nor any other side effects – that is when I experienced the power of God. But then came the next setback – I went in for surgery on 3<sup>rd</sup> October (another day that holds mixed emotions – my husband’s birthday and the day my feminity came under attack). The magnitude of problem stuck me only when I came out of surgery and realized that I had lost an important organ and the physical deficit started to haunt me. After surgery my doctor told me that she is satisfied with my biopsy result and that I would need two more cycles of chemotherapy and no radiation – viola – my joy knew no bounds – because it meant the end of treatment.

After a month of recuperation, I joined back work and today after 10 years, I am perfectly fit and fine – in fact much better in physical and mental frame of mind – sometimes I should thank the ‘cancer’ that has transformed me . I am grateful to the Hand of God for his miraculous healing power, the dedicated team of doctors and staff at the Cancer Institute for the excellent treatment and care and my ever loving family for the comfort and security all through.

Despite all this I felt a vacuum in me and after some introspection I felt the need to give something in return for this new lease of life. I had always been toying with the idea of helping

the less fortunate but I could not zero in on what to do and how to do. It was then I realized that I could use my 'survivor' status to extend a hand to the cancer patients. Now my life has become a full circle. The joy of seeing a smile on a patient's face and see their eyes light up with renewed confidence when I disclose my experience is worth living for - have conquered Cancer and now helping patients do the same.

IN this context I would like to share some of the instances where my survivor status has helped in making a difference to the lives of cancer patients.

Mehrunissa a young mother diagnosed with breast cancer was at the Cancer Institute waited for her turn to meet the doctor for charting her treatment process. I happened to see her weeping and on enquiry she mentioned that now with this 'dreadful disease' her husband is sure to abandon her as she would be 'useless' to him as she will not be 'normal' (ready for no physical relationship). After speaking to her for a while I realized that her husband had in fact accompanied her to the hospital but was not willing to be seen with her due to the stigma attached to her disease. He was waiting outside the waiting room. I then spoke to her at length assuring her that once her treatment is complete she can continue her 'normal' life. But she was not convinced. It is then that I told her that I was a survivor and that I am now living life 'normally'. That brought an astonished look on her face and then she asked me to speak to her husband to convince him. I then spoke to her husband separately. He was misled by his relatives that cancer is a curse and in case he continues to live with her; he might also be a victim. After an hour long chat, he seemed convinced and I could see signs of a smile on his lips. Then Mehrunissa was also called into the room and as a first step both of them shook hands with each other. I met after 6 months when she had come for her routine checkup and this time her husband was seated next to her while they were waiting to see the doctor. My heart was filled with joy.

One day I got a call from the Psycho Oncology department for the Cancer Institute asking me to meet Lakshmi who was diagnosed with breast cancer but was refusing to take treatment. I rushed to the institute and saw Lakshmi with her daughter sitting in the waiting room with her head bowed and weeping. Lakshmi was a widow and her daughter had just completed her graduation. Lakshmi was employed in a school as a temporary staff. They lived on her meager salary. She said she did not have the money to spend on treating her disease as she believed that cancer could not be cured. She also showed me some write ups from local dailies and some printed handouts which she was carrying which said that hospitals and doctors are out to make money by offering some kind of treatment. Hence she had decided to go home and wait for her death. Whatever little money she had saved up was for her daughter's survival and not for wasting on 'useless treatment' is what I told her that ' what if I tell you there is cure for cancer and that you can live a normal life after treatment.'. She looked at me with a mocking smile on her face and asked me ' are you canvassing for the hospital' . I then told her that I was a breast

cancer survivor but she refused to believe me and her mocking smile one grew and she said ‘ you are lying, you look so nice and healthy, I just can’t believe’. It is at that point that I pulled out the patient identity card (which I normally carry with me) issued by the institute. One look at that and her entire body language changed from negative to positive... she got up from her seat and fell at my feet and said ‘ I am now seeing God in front of me’. She agreed to take the treatment and went straight to meet the Doctor. Three months into her treatment, I met her, she looked cheerful and strong. This time she had come alone, her daughter has taken up a job. Lakshmi herself was planning to go back to her job at the school.

On one of my usual visits to the Institute, I met Krithika, a young mother of two little children who was posted for surgery. She was surrounded by her husband and relatives but she was sitting grimly on her bed. There was a sense of gloom in the room as everyone looked worried.

I introduced myself as a breast cancer survivor and said I was here to talk to her. She had several unanswered questions and one by one she started shooting them.

- Will I pass on my illness to my daughters.
- Who will marry the children of a cancer patient
- Will I be alive to take care of my children
- Will my husband accept me and love me as before

After talking to her for some time, she seemed to have gained some amount of courage and she was prepared for the surgery. I met her after a a month and this time she looked so strong and cheerful. She had completed her 4<sup>th</sup> cycle of chemotherapy and was on the road to recovery. Her husband was with her with his arms around her – All her doubts seemed to have been erased.

- This is a story of a young lady who by a rational approach faced the emotional trauma of a diagnosis of Breast Cancer and is alive and well today.
- She has in her narration stressed the need for a positive approach in meeting the challenges of cancer and not to compromise on medical advice. She was certainly different from many others. There are many lessons to be learnt.
- The journey through cancer has made her a woman of commitment and dedication to the cause of breast cancer. She is a great asset to the Cancer Institute (WIA). She is an active member of the Muthulakshmi Support Group of the Cancer Institute.
- The support group meets once a month and provides counseling for patients under treatment or those diagnosed with cancer. It is of considerable help both to the patient and the family.
- Do you like to volunteer for membership of the support group?
- Survivor patients can be the most powerful ambassadors n cancer education.
- Women other than survivors who are committed to cancer care are most welcome.
- One of the advances in cancer care is not only cure but quality care i.e. the oncologist should strive to put the patient back to normal living.
- Mr Gracey Varghese was 44 years old when she was presented to the Cancer Institute (WIA) 10 years ago.



## Story

**Capt. Kirthan Kumar**

At the very onset my sincere thanks to each and everyone at the heart warming Institute for giving me this opportunity to express my feelings about how I came to terms with my illness and where I am and what I do today is only because of my team of doctors headed by the Chairman of Medical Oncology Dr T G Sagar, Dr Ramanan, Dr Bhagirathan and Dr Sreedharan.

I have to say that without the support of my family and the care and love that I received from all of them, there is no way that I would be writing to all of you.!

Dr Shanta, it was indeed a pleasant surprise to receive your letter last evening and I am setting about writing this for your book straightaway. Thank you! I am really proud to be given the opportunity.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls; before I actually go into details of the treatment as such I would like all of you to know the type of person I have grown up to be. I have lived all my life in Chennai and have had a healthy life right from childhood. You could refer to me as a very outdoors sort of person. Right from the time I was a child I had a passion for flying, and I liked anything that moves fast, be it cars, bikes, planes...just about anything! Extreme sport involving lots of thrill (some call it danger would you believe...) always attracted my attention.

I have to say that I have been trekking and climbing from the time I was 14 years old. That was when I completed a massive 108 km trek in the Sahayadris Mountain in Central India. At the age of 18, I was the youngest mountaineer to reach the Summit of a 6504 m (about 21000 feet approx.) peak in the Garhwal Himalayas.

I represent my club on the swimming team and set an even record for a 25m freestyle competition as well.

The life I led naturally kept me fit to accomplish all this.

My parents were very supportive of my passion to fly in 1996. I was sent to Britain to complete my Private Pilot License and in 1998 was sent to America to complete my Commercial Pilots License. What followed was a long wait for almost two years without a job and in the year 2000, the new millennium offered me my first job as a Pilot.

### **Detection and Diagnosis**

It was the summer of 2002 and as usual it meant long hours of swimming in the club pool. This was when I developed a cough and after home remedies, under the guidance of my General Practitioner, I was prescribed a round of antibiotics. After a week, the cough refused to subside and if I remember right the medication was strengthened. I resumed the medication but with absolutely no relief. However, the intensity of the cough continued.

On the next visit to the General Practitioner, he suggested that I get an x-ray of the chest and here a mediastinal mass was discovered. What followed was a biopsy and CT scans, a time during which I was being led to believe that it may just be Tuberculosis.

Once the results were out I was told by my entire family about what I was eventually diagnosed with and the options available for treatment. I have to mention that this was a very difficult time for them. I had kept an open mind with this bit of information. I had heard about Hodgkin's disease and knew that a very talented, not to mention young, English motorcycle rider suffered the same way and was back to his winning ways at the very time I was being informed of my illness.

Immediately I knew (or believed) that my illness would be temporary and did not make too much of it. Yes, I do reiterate that I did not make too much of it. By this time I had the pleasure of meeting Dr Shanta, who informed me about how long the treatment was expected to last and armed with that piece of news I felt much better. The point that I would like to highlight was that early detection made life so much easier for me.

At this point I was introduced to Dr Ramanan and the way he spoke to me about what I was diagnosed with how his team and him would go about treating me left me with a lot to look forward in life.

Now in all this melee, when I really wanted to know was whether I could fly again. The possibility of me not being able to fly was looming. Towards getting over this I have to thank everyone at Blue Dart Aviation for their heart warming support. Specially Mr Nitin Gupte, the COO, Mr Prem Thomas, Head HR, Capt. J.P.Singh, Bhatt the Chief Flight Operations Managers for all the support towards getting me back in the "Right Seat".

## **Treatment**

I was admitted in July that year to the Cancer Institute for my first cycle of chemotherapy. The treatment decided was 6 cycles of chemotherapy followed by radiation to the Mediastinum

I have to say that the team of Doctors selected the medications quite carefully, keeping in mind my return to aviation that was almost a reality.

The first cycle was a breeze and so was the second to my memory. I have to say that during this time I lived a normal life. The only thing I was not doing was not consuming alcohol and swimming. Apart from the fact that I was ill, I made my brain understand that I was still “Kirthan” and that I am someone who loves life and I began living my life as if nothing had happened.

Folks, there is no point being down and dusted just because one is ill. One has to keep thinking positive all the time. This worked for me, and I would like to share it with you. In my mind I kept thinking about work, called the office occasionally to see what was new in the airline, and kept thinking about life after treatment and occasionally thought about what I would be doing on my layovers ... and generally took it as a long holiday.

Friends would come over and cheer me up and it was time to reflect on life in general. I still remember when the chemotherapy started getting to me mentally as well as physically. My mother has taken a Pranic healing class to cleanse the medicines before they were injected.

After the 4<sup>th</sup> cycle, I began putting on weight (almost 12 kgs. in all) and my hair began to fall off when I saw a new me emerge!. But I still did not let it get me down as my prognosis was excellent.

December 2002 was my last cycle of chemotherapy and I was happy to be informed that it was indeed my last cycle.

In the year 2003 radiation began to the mediastinal mass and after 20 odd sessions all treatment ended. After about a month, it was declared that my illness was under remission and I issued a fresh certificate.

### **Post Therapy**

February 2003 saw me return to the office armed with the news that I was now all right. Blue Dart immediately commenced the process of getting me back into the air,. With license renewal checks and the much needed clearance from the Aviation Medical Board. Here I would like to thank the office of the DGCA in giving me the assurance that upon completion of my treatment I would definitely be given clearance to fly. The confidence that the authorities gave me actually kept my spirits really high. My employers made my life a lot easier by not taxing me with a high work load initially and returning me to the operational capacity in a phased manner.

It is now a little more than seven years since I've been in remission. I lead a very normal life. I have become a commander with my present Employer for the last three years and living my life as though nothing happened but I do keep it.

Yes, I have been regular in my follow up checks as required by the Cancer Institute and maintain a healthy life style. But definitely not the extent of making life boring.

The fact that I now currently hold an Airline Transport Pilot License requires me to undergo a medical check up every six months as a consequence I have the need to trouble Dr Sagar for a medical opinion ever so often.!

Lastly but definitely not the least I would love to thank Mrs Girija, Mrs Ranga Kumar who offered me a great support whenever I had to visit the Institute for my chemotherapy sessions.

### **Advice**

The first of this is to patients.... You are the only one who can make it easy for the rest! Saying so I mean, realize that it is not the end of the world.....whatever it is....FIGHT....Your frame of mind sets the tone to all around you. They in turn will offer better support.

The second is to the family. At the end of the day, do realize that it is the individual's fight. To do this successfully, an enormous amount of positive energy needs to be generated. Simply put, remove elements that generate negativity...even if it means people!

- A young air pilot with Hodgkin's disease
- This is a success story of Hodgkin's disease
- Hodgkin's disease which was considered incurable prior to 1970 is today categorized as curable, as long as it is early.
- Patient reported for breathlessness while playing and was found to have mediastinal Hodgkin disease (glands in the chest)
- Today technology that is available to evaluate extent of disease and monitor disease during treatment, advent of newer drugs have all helped significantly in patient care and improved survival.

## Story

**Sriniasan Balaji**

I (aged 21, in Dec 1983) was walking back home after finishing my CA Inter class, the day I felt slight pain in the right hip bone. I took some pain killer from my family doctor and even after 2 days the pain aggravated. That made my father think and he took me to an Ortho specialist where he gave some pain killer after an x-ray and it didn't turn till 2 months.

Again, same kind of pain at the same place made my father and doctor think and later it was assumed / diagnosed after MRI scan as Bone TB because of swelling. Soon after taking the tablets for a couple of days I had some allergic symptoms which made my father look for some other ortho specialist for a second opinion. The basic questions which the other doctor asked us to confirm was whether it was TB or not. That made both of us think, because I did not have any of those symptoms.

Confusion, panic, fear continued and another famous other specialist confirmed that it was nothing after his review (a quick, false conclusion).

Finally fate through God's grace has directed my father to take me to another famous ortho specialist Dr Sriram (Mylapore) where after his perfect diagnosis (Bone scan and CT scan) said that I needed a biopsy to confirm the swelling. After a couple of days, the biopsy results came and it was confirmed as malignancy (Cancer).

My family was shattered and had no words to explain what kind of situation we were in at that point of time. I was enjoying life as a normal guy, I don't smoke, drink or even chew pan. It was really hard for us to digest the fact and come out and think about the next step where to continue the treatment.

Dr Sriram directed us to his student Dr Mayilvahanan (first in India to perform Bone transplant and to receive Padma Sri Award). He referred us to one of the costliest hospital in the city, which we were not able to afford at that point of time.

When asked about second hospital, but we want to have no compromise on the quality of the treatment, he referred us to the only World famous hospital and most popular in India for treating Cancer. The Adyar Cancer Hospital WIA. This is where one would get excellent treatment under well experienced doctors at a reasonable cost.

My treatment started in May 2004 and the duration was one year. During my treatment, all doctors, staff, attendants and volunteers were very affectionate in their approach. No negligence in their part throughout the period. Here I would like to single out Dr Ramanan who is always

friendly with patients. He was charming right from 6 am all the way to 7 pm. Sometimes we even used to disturb him when he was at home.

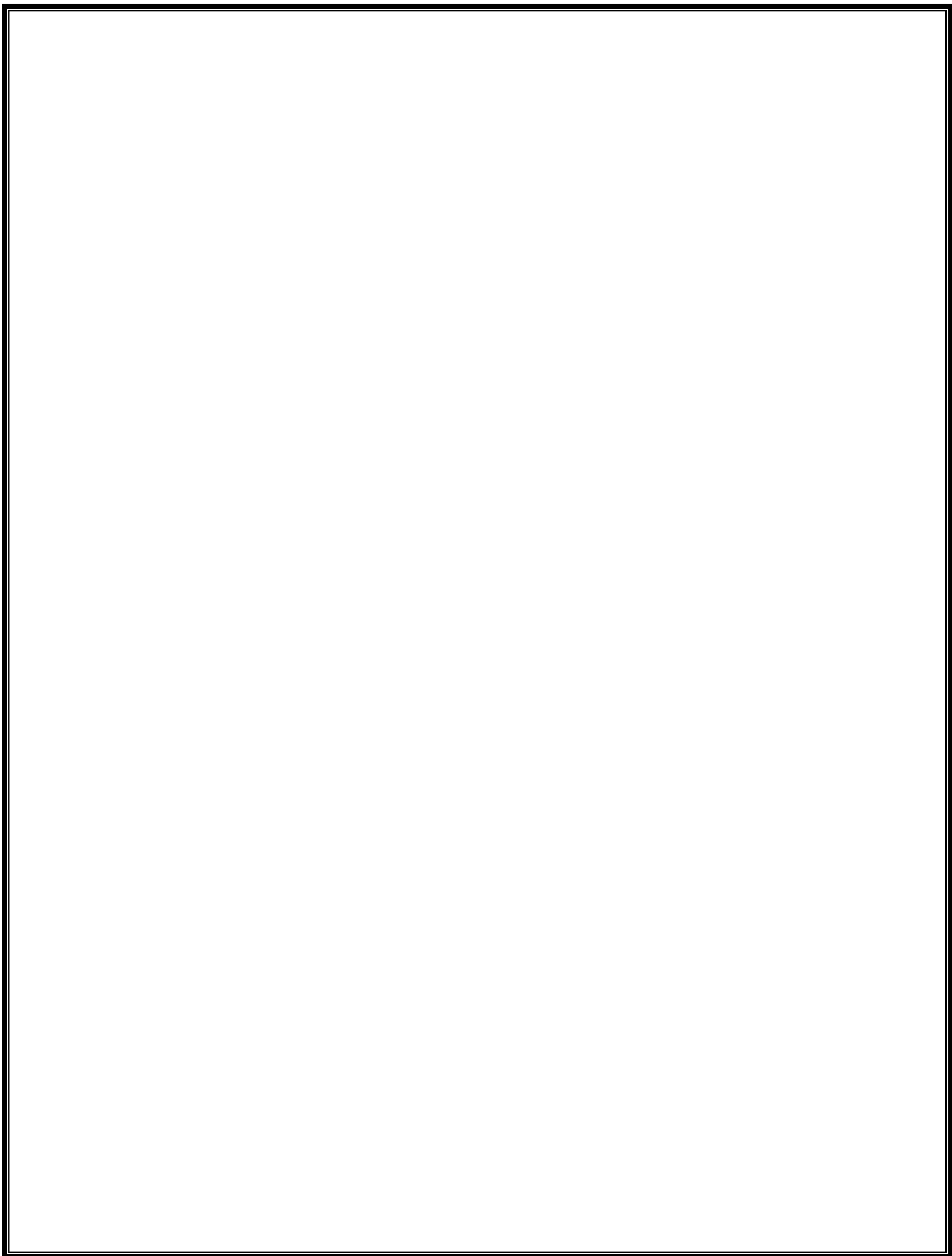
Every week doctors used to hold meeting to discuss the treatments given to patients and further treatments they might need. We have not heard any adverse remarks about this hospital, staff and hygiene.

People from other parts of country are coming here for treatment, thanks to the never tiring service of the Chairman. By God's grace and under the sincere care of your doctors, I have recovered well now. I have completed M.Com., ICWA and CA (One group in final to be completed) and is now working with Wipro, Chennai.

What I learnt from my past experience is "do not panic", "be bold" and do whatever your doctor's say. Have faith in them. Cancer can be cured if detected early.

I hope and pray for speedy recovery and good health for all patients.

- Srinivasan Balaji at the age of 21 years was diagnosed as an osteosarcoma.
- Osteosarcomas constitutes...% of all cancers and mainly affects the younger age group. It is an aggressive tumor. Before the advent of chemotherapy as an integral part of the oncologic care, the only treatment for these tumors was amputation of the limb. It was emotionally traumatizing and many patients declined treatment. The overall outlook was poor since many of them developed systemic metastases i.e. spread to the lung or brain.
- The introduction of chemotherapy (drug therapy) as an integral component of oncologic care revolutionized concepts in cancer care and changed the cancer horizon. It brought improved survival in many cancers including advanced cancers.
- In osteosarcomas, it brought in the era of "organ conservation". Today there is no need for amputation. This has been possible after the advent of chemotherapy.
- But unless cancer is early, organ conservation is not possible.
- Early detection and appropriate treatment in a specialized center is still necessary to have a successful outcome.
- The need for specialty care in oncologic care is documented beyond doubt.
- Balaji is alive and well at present and works with WIPRO GE.
- Just a word on cost of cancer care  
Yes, cost is high. We need to pay or advances in technology, newer drugs, expertise and many other issues.
- But it will also be the responsibility of the government and the medical profession to make medicare affordable and equitable.
- The Cancer Institute strives hard to provide service without any social or economic divide.



## Story of Mrs R Sulochana

**R Lalitha (Daughter)**

My Mother R Sulochana aged 52 suffered from lung cancer in the year 2006. With the blessings of the Almighty, we took her to Dr Mani and Late dr Shastry of Cancer Institute, Adyar.

After an encouraging counseling, chemotherapy was started for her immediately within a month. Though she suffered during that treatment period, the consistent encouragement and the moral support given by the doctors and others in the hospital helped her a lot. Especially, our pranams to Late Dr Shastry who took extreme care in her treatment very patiently.

Belonging to a very orthodox family, she hardly visited a doctor in her life. SO even in the initial diagnosis of cancer she refused repeatedly to undergo treatment. But her self-confidence and desire to live with family and grandchildren and of course her confidence and prayers to God with the blessings of Shri Shirdi Sai Baba and Bhagavn Sathya Sai Baba and His Holiness Paramacharya Swamigal , Kancheepuram, she recovered soon. There was hair loss and weight loss in the first stage. But, with the extreme care given by the doctor in Cancer Institute, she regained both. The motivation of the doctors helped her to recover soon. Now she is 61 with absolutely no health problems.

I take this opportunity to thank each and every doctor, specialist, consultants, ward boys, nurses and Aayas who helped us a lot to get along during mother's illness.

My mother is a happy woman now with sound health. I pray God to let every patient to get good doctors like in Cancer Institute.

- Mr Sulochana, W/o. Mr Ramdoss
- This patient had a cancer of the esophagus
- Despite moderate morbidity during therapy, she withstood it, thanks to careful nursing and family support.
- Ca. of the esophagus is one of the more difficult cancers to treat. Many are tobacco related. This is a patient who is non-tobacco user.
- Treatment of Esophageal cancers can be primary surgery wherever possible or chemo radiation which is a combination of chemotherapy and radiation and carries some morbidities. Unless the disease is early, surgery may not be possible.
- Today conventional radiation has been replaced by more sophisticated techniques which have significantly reduced radiation morbidity and contributed to precision radiation and better survival.



## My Story

**B Srimathy**

In a routine annual general check-up in one of the city hospitals, I was told to undergo lumpectomy( surgical procedure to remove the tumour alone) which confirmed I had breast cancer. Though it appeared to be a bad news, I was very fortunate that it was detected at a very early stage. Also I always have a positive approach to everything in life and which helps one to face any challenge in a better manner.

I approached Adyar Cancer Institute for further treatment after the surgery. I understand that organ conservation is gaining momentum in Oncology treatment for breast cancer, irrespective of the stage of the cancer in place of mastectomy (complete removal of breast). The doctor at the Institute was in a great predicament whether to preserve the breast though it was very early stage. But since given radiation and was told that mastectomy could be deferred, as this could always be performed in case of recurrence.

Now it is 4 years since I was diagnosed with cancer. Though there were some setbacks in my career and health, when I underwent the treatment, I could bounce back and now I am a senior executive in an industry. I would like to sum up as follows:

- I. Prevention is better than cure if you ensure
  - a. Proper diet – balanced food with high fiber and anti-oxidants
  - b. Active lifestyle
  - c. Regular exercise – any form of exercise is good, but I opine that Yoga asana combined with Pranayama and meditation would do wonders in our lives over all physical and mental health and happiness
  - d. Stress free mental frame of mind. Stress has become a way of life from kindergarten, but with meditation and right frame of mind, we learn to handle challenges.
  - e. Regular health check-ups
    - i. For women, a simple pap smear test would help detect cervical cancer
    - ii. Another common cancer today among women is breast cancer. Every adult woman should do a self examination to ensure that there is no lump in the breast followed by periodical mammography as advised by doctors. This would ensure that Cancer is detected at a very early stage and cured as in the case of mine
  - f. Avoid usage of tobacco in any form
  - g. Avoid liquor and junk food
- II. If detected with cancer

- a. Approach a cancer specialty hospital, especially if surgical procedure is required, however minor it appears to be. I strongly feel that a general surgeon of any hospital however good or competent they cannot handle a surgery except a cancer specialty hospital,. There are advanced techniques of medical treatment today and one can handle the ailment in a better manner with a positive approach by accepting the ailment.
- b. Never fear anything or anyone in life, but fear only God above and conscience inside.
- c. Ensure early and proper treatment
- d. After treatment, regular follow up is essential especially for cancer.

- A 50 year old lady who reported to the Cancer Institute (WIA) after excision of a lump in the breast and reported as cancer.
- Pathologic examination revealed a pre-cancerous lesion with minimal focus of invasive cancer i.e. the pre cancer was turning to be cancer in small areas.
- Options for early breast cancer and pre cancers are many today. However those options have to be taken after careful evaluation by a specialized team.
- Another word of caution, any lump in the breast has to be evaluated carefully prior to excision. Certain breast lumps are clearly benign, some clearly malignant and yet in some, it may not be so clear.
- When resorting to an excision biopsy, it must be done with a full understanding of the possibilities.
- This patient had favourable prognostic factors and could therefore be treated by non-surgical methods.
- Meticulous follow of patients is essential.

## Life is a Mystery

**Harinder Kaur Sraw**

It's a second lease of life for me and I want to make more of it in these gifted years than I made in the last fifty. I have realized how precious and unpredictable life is so am not letting it just go by living for myself... want to share my experiences. I am sharing them for sheer pleasure of satisfaction and contributing my bit in instilling hope, strength and courage in those of you who are going through it all. God has been kind to me and would love to pass it on to others. I remember one of my favourite school prayers which was...

“have you had a kindness shown? Pass it on!

T'was not giv'n for thee alone: Pass it on!

Let it travel down the years,

Let it travel down the years .....

Let it wipe another's tears...'

Life is a mystery. It's so exciting to look forward to each moment. Discover and enjoy what unfolds in front of you and make the most of it. There are moments we are exhilarated by the gifts time opens up and there are moments when we are crestfallen too. I strongly believe God loves us all and has the good of each one at heart so whatever happens. He has our best at heart. Not that I don't feel dejected, but at times ask Him the question “why me” but each time my trust in Him takes over and I'm back to normal positive day today living.

It was one of those days (in February) when you have the luxury of lazing around the house with not much to do and when I got tired of lazing around decided to do something constructive. My yearly medical checkup which I normally get done in December was pending so thought of catching up with it. It was during the routine medical checkup that the doctor suspected something in my mammography and advised me to go in for further investigations.

Lo and behold he was right ... I was diagnosed with bilateral breast cancer on February 18, 2011. I couldn't believe it was me, as always thought such things happen to others so how come this time it was me. Was there a mistake? That's when I realized am very much a part of that 'others' and can't take advantage of being 'I, me, and myself'. It's amazing how we consider ourselves a part of 'others' only when we stand to gain something otherwise we're happy being with one self and watch from a distance. We forget that He made us all as one and the same....eventually had to bow to Him and say, “You win God and I accept what you have to offer with a smile”.

Honestly the smile didn't come immediately it was after shedding a few tears, sometime and self pity that the realization and acceptance dawned on me. It made me more open to think positive and that's when I decided not to let a few astray cells cause havoc in my life.... Life which was gifted to me by Almighty needs to be treasured and not let go off.

One of my friends asked me how I felt when it was diagnosed, I told him, “I am a teacher by profession and have witnessed that in a class of about 40 students you have a few students who are naughty and disturb the whole class. You handle them and let them be till they become a threat to the rest of the class. The day they become a threat you call them and tell them firmly either to mend their way or to leave. Similarly, the cancer cells were always there in me and not bothering me but now they have become a threat to my life so I’ve told them either to fall back on track or get lost. I have given no other choice to them.”

I went through the complete treatment i.e. lumpectomy, six cycles of the chemotherapy and thirty-one radiation sittings, which got over on October 7, 2011. All through my treatment I was working, mostly from home – though attending important meetings when required and lead a near normal life. I could go through it all and emerge a winner only because of the care, love and courage my family, friends and doctors showered on me; not to forget the strength which my belief in the Almighty gave me. Love, medicine and prayers can actually work miracles.

After my problem was diagnosed our family doctor advised me to go to an institute rather than an individual oncologist and that’s what we did. Since we didn’t know any oncologist or institute personally, he suggested an oncologist’s name who we consulted. I am a little fussy when it comes to doctors as I need to like them and have confidence in them before moving ahead; when we went to SMH Curie Cancer Centre, New Delhi to meet this doctor I was happy to interact with him. It was not just him but the whole team of doctors which impressed me with their patience, warmth and understanding so decided to go ahead with my treatment from the same institute.

The first meeting of the ‘Tumour Board’... found the name interesting, was to be held and I was asked if I wanted to be a part of it. “Yes, of course, it’s my body and I need to know what’s happening with it and what you plan doing to correct that; want to be a part of the decision making procedure,” was my reply. They wanted to start the treatment immediately and I wanted to wait as there was a wedding in the family, the moment we all had been waiting for excitedly and didn’t want anything of anyone to take the zing out of that for every one including me. I decided not to disclose my ailment to anyone till after the wedding, only my husband and children knew about it. So it was decided that the treatment will begin after the wedding and so it was. Those ten days gave me time to enjoy the wedding and prepare myself for the journey ahead.

I shared my diagnosis with one of my close friends, who’s a very powerful Reiki master and she suggested that I don’t talk about it with anyone and everyone but only with people who are close and matter to me. Not that I had committed a wrong or it was something to hide but she said that each person you share it with will ask you questions and tell you about his/her experiences,

personal or otherwise; you'll keep repeating your story and hearing everyone's story pleasant or unpleasant and that will all play in your sub conscious mind. That made sense to me and I decided to go along with what she said. She also advised me to practice Emotional Freedom Technique regularly along with exercise, meditation and saying my prayers.

I spent hours on the net to gather information about breast cancer and its treatment including the after effects, so was well aware and prepared to face it all. After all this awareness it didn't seem scary at all and I was ready to take it on. MY family and friends were there to support me, give courage and add to my strength. Taking control of my illness and reaching out to others helped me ease stress and heal my body faster. I continued with my practices of yoga, meditation and prayer as and when my energy levels permitted and to the extent they permitted. I knew I'll start losing my hair after 15 days or receiving the first cycle of chemotherapy so had a hair piece made which I used to wear when ever I went out. But, I was very comfortable with the no hair look and believe me it was so convenient in summers.

My husband Gurdip, his sisters Manjit Didi and Nimmi Didi, his brother Daljit and our children Vijay and Bhavneet, and Jasmeet provided the emotional support, took care of my likes and dislikes especially when it came to my daily routine, healthy diet and medicines. They planned it in such a rotational way that one of them was with me throughout the treatment months. I felt like a pampered child who was the centre of the family's care and affection, was never left alone to brood and always kept constructively occupied with work, reading, writing and watching television.

I had heard nearly every one saying you must see in order to believe but now I know you must believe in order to see. The all pervasive presence of Almighty was felt by me all through my treatment, I had a dialogue with him in the Operation Theatre when the surgeons were busy with my lumpectomy. He was there to strengthen me through the chemotherapy sessions and kept me company in the radiation room. He was there reaffirming my belief that life is full of hurdles but if we work towards overcoming them we will.

I thank God, my family, friends and doctors who supported me , believed in my strength and at no point of time let me waiver from the path to heal. The small caring gestures of the nursing staff of SMH Curie Cancer Centre which spoke so much and gave me strength; how can I forget the reassuring smile of the surgeon when being wheeled inside the operation theatre with instilled faith in me and the ever approachable doctor who gave me the courage to sail through easily.

Remember dear friends Life is like a game of cards. The hand that is dealt you represent determinism; the way you play it is free will. There are four faiths very crucial for recovery –

faith in oneself, one's doctor, one's treatment and one's spiritual faith. Luckily I had them all so decided to play to Win and win I did with a sprint in my feet and a song in my heart.

Cheers.... It's not the end of life but the beginning of another learning experience and a beautiful inning after that. The doctors have not only added years to my life but in fact life to years which make me say –

“Yeh jo gehre sannate hain waqt ne subko hi baante hain,  
Thoda ghum hai sabga qissa thodi dhoop hai sabka hissa,  
Aankh teri bekaar hi nam hai har pal ek naya mausam hai,  
Kyun tu aise pal khota hai dil aakhir tu kyun rota hai”.

(These moments of deep silence are a part of every one's life,  
A little sadness along with bright sunshine is a part of every one's story.  
Your eyes are moist for no reason, each moment is a new beginning.  
Why are you wasting precious moments in shedding tears).

- Narration made by a remarkably brave lady and certainly inspiring. She has shown her keen awareness about cancer, how one should face it, take a decision on where to be treated. This understanding is totally lacking in over 75% of cases that we see. However, the emotional responses, the need for family support and physician counseling and faith in god are no different. In some form or other.
- The understanding of the complexity of oncologic care and is best in a specialty centre is important.
- It is globally accepted and documented that oncologic care in a specialized institution with a working multidisciplinary team is ideal and has note number of successful results than non-specialty institutions. This depends on the academic background, volume of patients managed and meticulous follow up.
- Mrs.Kaur has had comprehensive breast cancer management including breast conservation surgery.

## **Experience of Being Affected by Cancer**

**Geetha Srinivasan**

Children's Park – Guindy – being a Chennaite, and having brought up our two young boys in this city, my husband and I have visited this place many times, but I would most certainly turn my head away when I see the adjoining compound wall, that of THE CANCER INSTITUTE. The very word CANCER used to make me feel jittery, since my father had died of stomach cancer six years back.

When I had, for no known reason, begun to have frequent mouth ulcers, I visited many doctors and so called specialists in their respective fields. To my dismay, none of them could diagnose it. Finally my husband suggested that we visit the Cancer Institute and I halfheartedly agreed to it.

After the preliminary tests and biopsy, the shattering news was declared to my husband and later to me that the result was 'positive for malignancy. I told my siblings and my mother about the sad news and all of us cried. At one stage they consoled themselves and started planning for the next best step forward my husband met the doctors and discussed about the treatment and the financial part. I was depressed and asked them to leave and let me die. After much crying and consoling, I finally agreed for the treatment. The little bit of philosophy that I had read and the Karma theory gave me some consolation.

I was working as a teacher, but I resigned my job with great reluctance and also told my neighbours about my illness, and they also started praying for me. My family – my husband, children, sister, brother and mother, were pillar of strength.

The first step in the treatment was to remove all my teeth and with a great cry I accepted and the same was removed in one go. My husband took me to the Cancer Institute every day for radiation and chemo. My sister used to visit me at the hospital every day, rain or shine. My brother used to visit me every week-end from Bangalore. Their mere presence gave me so much of strength and they spread their positive energy. My husband used to say that I look much healthier and better than the previous day which I started believing.

A mother gives birth to her child only once but I feel my mother gave me re-birth as well. She used to feed me through the Ryle's tube with much care and affection for about 4 months. I got calls from my college friends and cousins living abroad enquiring about my progress. Once, my best friend at college visited me and suggested that we read the Vishnusahasranama (the 1000 holy name of Lord Vishnu, which is believed to be a panacea for all ills). I had not been using my vocal cords for many days then, but was somehow interested to try. To everyone's surprise, I chanted the whole sloka which ran for more than twenty minutes. I think by frequently engaging

myself in reading various sacred verses, I exercised my tongue and vocal chords well enough to avoid the need to go for speech therapies.

I was not able to talk due to the Mucositis and used to have a frown on my face when I waited for my turn of radiation. My doctor would show the huge crowd waiting in the hall and ask me to be cheerful. I used to wonder how it is possible for someone with so much pain to be cheerful, but many of them used to laugh at jokes and keep smiling. During the period, when I could not talk for about two to three months my husband used to ask doubts to the doctors about my good care and remedies to be followed. The doctors, though rushing for meeting or other important work, always stopped to answer all queries of all patients with a smile on their face. Senior / Junior doctors and nurses of the Cancer Institute are wonderful people, very patient with all the patients.

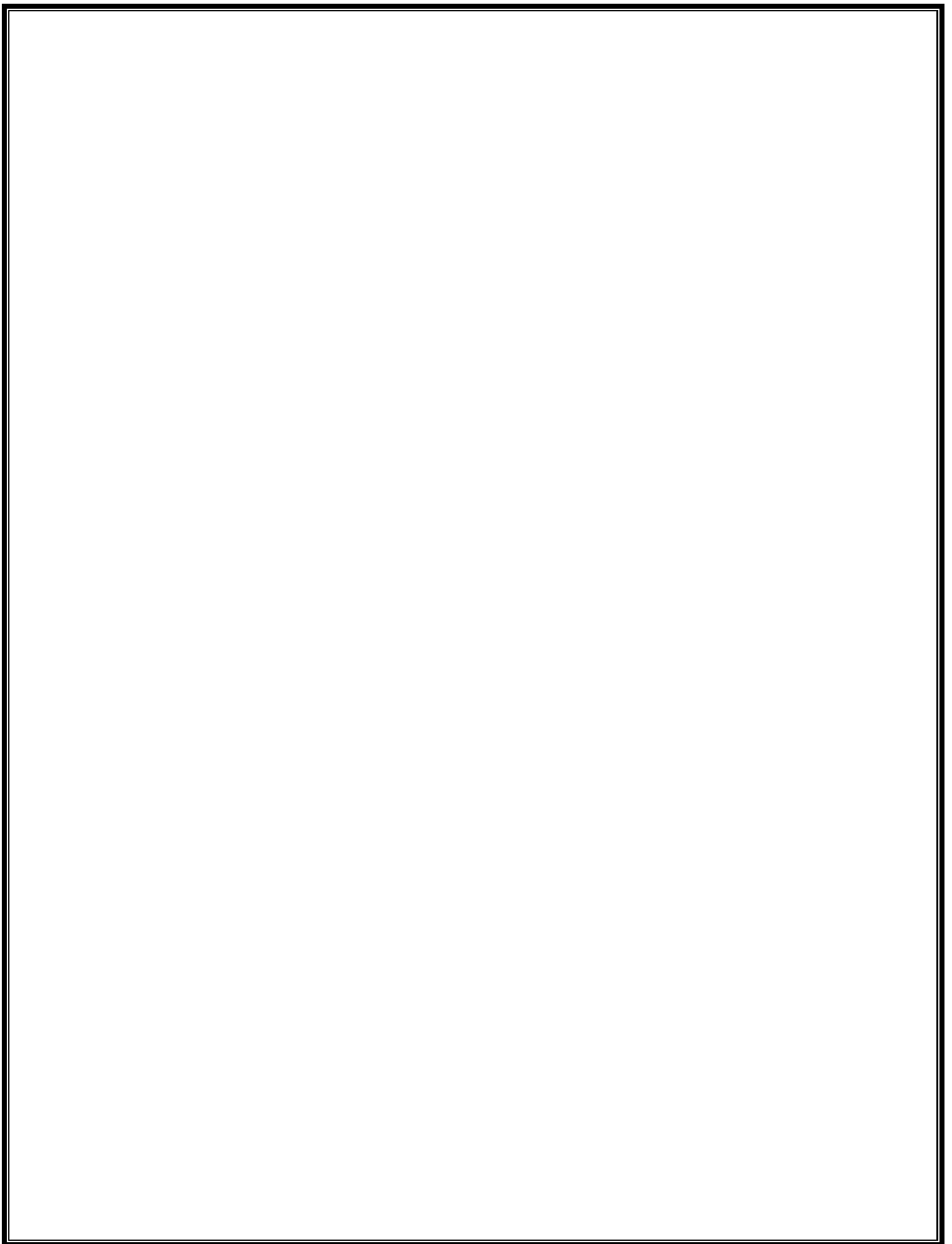
When my doctor removed the tube from my nose I was nervous about whether I would be able to swallow. The doctor asked me to drink water in front of him and encouraged me. He said it is alright if you spit or spill it on me. Do not worry if you are not able to swallow, else I will again insert the tube! After removing the tube I started slowly and steadily eating through my mouth. With the confidence and encouragement given by my doctor and family I made progress in eating through my mouth. Meanwhile I had also mentally reconciled to eating completely bland food for a long time to come.

Finally the radiation and chemo ended and I was declared a winner in this battle against cancer.

Every episode of our life teaches us something. I have learnt about the strength we derive from people around us. I came across wonderful people during my trying and painful days. The whole episode helped me to see people around me in a new light. It also helped me to discover the courageous person inside me. "Prayers bring victory" How true! Thank you God for everything.

- It is difficult to comment on Geetha Srinivasan story. She does not indicate the cancer site. From the narration it was probably an oral cancer, to be precise tongue cancer. This is based on the fact that she had to undergo of total dental extraction and also the oral mucosal reaction during treatment.
- Oral cancers are Ca of the cheek, gingum, anterior tongue and palate. They are generally tobacco related in over 80% if cases. 10-20% are now tobacco users to which category Mrs Geetha belongs.
- The query most frequently made is, " I am not a tobacco user – why cancer?"
- A study of oral cancer in relation to tobacco done at the Institute in 1974 showed that the relative risk of oral cancers in habitual chewer was 84 times greater than in the tobacco non user (published data). Of adults, who were non tobacco users only 0.1% developed either oral or pre cancer.
- This applies to majority of non-cancers at many other sites – like lung etc.
- Studies are ongoing to identify the underlying factor in these non-tobacco related cancers.
- The patient has referred to morbidities of treatment which are part of the treatment process and cannot be avoided but can be controlled.
- Self-denial, acceptance as karma and resort to prayer are the same in majority of patients irrespective of educational levels.





## **First Hand Report on Her Experience**

**Anonymous**

Carcinoma of the breast. In layman's terms cancer. It hit me when I least expected it. Here I was 60 going on 61, intent on leading a relaxed life or retirement, planning to indulge my tastes in painting and sewing, when – wham! Went all overboard, the moment I had my first suspicion.

The discovery of a lump in my breast in itself was accidental. But for a nagging pain in my shoulder and forearm, I doubt whether I would still be aware of it. Casually palpating the area to see where the pain originated, I suddenly found this lump, and the first conscious thought was one of stunned shock. Questions flitted across my mind, At my age? Years after menopause? Where did I go wrong? Diet? Exercise? Over work? Tension? No answers. All I know was that I was in serious trouble. A call to my daughter, a periodontics in the UAE confirmed it. Even if the tumour was benign, she said get it removed.

The initial reluctance to take any action was strong. Treatment involved physical suffering and money. All my close ones would be mentally and physically involved in the fight. And I was old. I mulled over the whole thing for a day. Then common sense asserted itself. I realized willing away the disease was foolishness and treatment however unpalatable was essential.

We were not new to the disease. My sister had had uterine cancer ten years back and had undergone hysterectomy under doctor V Shanta of Cancer Institute Madras. I decided I wanted none other than the same doctor to look into my problem.

My sister could take the news. What about my old mother? Already my daughter and son-in-law would be worried sick, and my son who had just joined a post in Singapore would go crazy knowing he wouldn't be able to take leave of absence. It hurt me no end to put all of them through the torture, once again, but I also realized that I had to take action immediately.

Fortunately we were able to get an appointment with the Chairman, Dr V Shanta within three days. My confidence in her was not at all misplaced. A kind and understanding lady, sensitive to the patient's trauma, she was still very practical. She did not mince words. "Yes", she said, "you have a good sized lump which may turn out cancerous. Only tests will tell. In any case, there is nothing to worry about" she added "because even if your test shows positive, you are probably beginning stage II and therefore very much curable and you may have to undergo only segmental mastectomy." This matter of fact approach of hers did much more to alleviate my doubts and fears than if she would have offered some palliatives. She made me realize that yes, I did have a problem but the sensible thing was to fight it and get it over with. For which I am grateful and thankful. I was now relieved enough to concentrate on the treatment process.

The tests started the next day I underwent sometimes two, sometimes three in a day if they were short. Of course, it was no picnic and tiring as well. And however much I convinced myself about not worrying, I will never ever forget the anxiety that made us look anxiously at the doctors taking those tests, mutely querying “is something wrong? Could you tell us what it is?” Again I am thankful to all those doctors. They understood the look and the anxiety behind it. So in cases like my chest x-ray, ECG, C T Scans and ultrasound of liver and pelvic region, I was told not to worry, there was no problem. However the doctors in charge of mammogram and FNAC tests referred me back t Dr Shantha for all queries and doubts. This did not affect me too much, since I had a deep rooted suspicion already.

At the next review, the doctor confirmed the diagnosis as carcinoma of the breast. There was a saving factory thought I had no disease, which is the greatest anxiety causing factory. God! I thought that is half the battle won!

Still there was a fear of surgery and the effects of radiation and chemotherapy to go through. Within a week of the last review I won given my first chemo cycle and started on radiation. On days my sister could take leave she stayed back to accompany me. On other days my old mother insisted on coming along.

At the radiation centre, I was given detailed instructions, by both the staff and the doctors in charge. They told me to be particular about intake of plenty of fluids, lots of greens and protein rich food. Also to keep the area radiated immersed in powder to help the healing.

The doctors in charge of chemo also briefed me on the reactions like nausea, palpitation, loss of blood count etc., and what should I do in such cases. My confidence in the treatment and the way it was handled reached a higher level. It was a great morale boost to know that these doctors knew exactly what they were about and what the patient needed.

I became more cheerful, chirpy in fact; I put away all my fears and started treating myself as a normal person. My doctors word “You can even climb the Everest if you feel like it. The treatment won’t deter you”, became to me a mantra. I found myself going about my usual chores of cooking, cleaning and housekeeping in general.

The next review confirmed my surgery date as 9<sup>th</sup> Jan 2001. I had to undergo a treadmill ECG before that since I was chronically hypertensive, and had chest pains very often. This test was, the doctor told me to just make sure I’ll stand the anesthesia as she was well aware of fears on this head. I could not complete the test. And my fear escalated to a phobia when the institute cardiologist opined that it would be risky to put me under GA. However, both my doctor and anesthesiologist were confident that there would be no problem. Any typical of her methodical approach my doctor would leave nothing to change. She had me consult an expert, Dr Murthy, in

the field practicing in Dr Ramachandra Medical College. He certified that though I had a slightly ischemic heart Anesthesia administration would cause no problem. I breathed a big sigh of relief; once again my respect for my doctor rose a notch higher for the thoroughness of her treatment; and that gave me the confidence to place my life in her hands. In fact, I told my people (my daughter had by this time come down and had her doubts clarified by my doctor) not to bother coming over for the surgery; not that they listened.

All the same they were relieved that I was mentally prepared for the surgery as I would ever be and had conquered my fears. My son too flew down and I had almost an email every day from my daughter-in-law.

I still remember the feelings when I came to, in the post-operative ward. My first one, a great relief that a major hurdle was over. My second, heartfelt thanks to God and the doctors who made it possible and gave me another lease on life. My discomforts, the pain and the weakness were all minor and bearable, so great was my sense of relief.

I now looked around with a new attitude and tried to instill the same confidence I felt, to my fellow sufferers, who were either getting ready to go to the operation theatre or were in the process of getting ready for it. Just as I gained confidence from patients who had been through it, prior to me. I am glad to say many took courage from my fears and experiences.

My heart goes out to everyone who has stood by me through this ordeal. My doctor, her staff, my relatives, multitude of friends who have prayed for me, and my students, I now understand that cancer is a disease one cannot fight alone. One does require the moral and physical support of people both close to you and other similar sufferers. The fight against the disease is both physically and emotionally draining, but with a will to beat it and with proper and efficient treatment it is not as big a hurdle as it seems. As in the case of climbing a hill one should never look back, only forwards. To all my friends who are suffering from the same malady, I wish to say only this. "Don't let go and keep your chin up. Though the battle against cancer is an uphill task, we are sure to reach the crest.

- The narration of a patient with a lump in the breast, a lady who probably belongs to an educated class. She has only mentioned a lump & no glands. Treatment was initial chemo radiation followed by surgery. No mention of nature of surgery as been made.
- The only comment is the identical responses to a diagnosis of cancer the impact of the first meeting with the doctors concerned and a rational understanding the acceptance of the treatment advised which enables a much easier recovery to get back to normality.
- She could have been a good volunteer for cancer education and awareness but unfortunately she does not want to be identified.
- The stigma about cancer and those who do not want others to know that they had cancer are more common in India.

## **Cancer Is Not Dreadful: But Delaying Treatment Is \_\_\_\_\_**

**Anonymous**

Those were terrible moments in my life – moments! I can never forget when I waited at the Cancer Institute amidst streams of visitors and anxious relatives crowding the corridors, holding my biopsy report in hand to see the doctor. I was confused, dazed and grief stricken. And the thoughts running in my mind were, what is the doctor going to say after seeing my report? What is in store for me, my husband and two sons? Why should this happen to me?

“Carcinoma in situ – this is only a pre-cancerous condition. Nothing to worry at all I can assure you 100% cure” - my doctors words sounded like a divine oracle. “You have to undergo a surgery (left mastectomy) was her professional advice.

Though I felt relieved at that moment, something was still pressing my heart. I was unable to accept the loss of one organ, which is such an integral part of my body, as a woman, a mother and a member of the society. I cried since I felt a tremendous blow, accompanied by the usual reaction of denial. In spite of many sources of support and help from people close to me, I was going through a phase of distress and depression, an overall feeling of helplessness, anxiety and confusion.

It was again a meeting with my doctor that helped me to view the situation in its proper perspective. Her empathy and analysis of the available options brought about greater clarity and led to the wisdom of my accepting the situation gracefully.

Five years rolled by without any problem, I was regular in my follow up visits. During these visits, I developed a greater respect for my doctor and could not help admiring her commitment and dedication to the cause, compassion to the patients, her leadership qualities, her simplicity and above all a high level of professional expertise and competence. Many a moment I wonder whether God had subjected me to this ‘test’ in order to make me come into contact with such an exceptional human being.

1996 – When I went for my check up, the doctor said that the lump in my right breast had become dense and recommended tests. The result 0 “Benign”, Still she suggested mastectomy since she felt it could turn cancerous. Should I lose my other breast also? I was reluctant; committed the mistake of skipping the follow up for one year, got myself occupied with an overseas visit to see my son. When I turned up for a review after a lapse of one year, the biopsy revealed that the lump had turned cancerous (lobular carcinoma). Once again I handed myself over completely to my doctor =- this time, radiation chemotherapy and mastectomy.

Once again I was filled with grief. I have reconciled myself to losing both the breasts. Should I also lose my long hair by undergoing chemotherapy? I was totally unprepared.

When I was shaken and shattered, my doctor's reassuring words gave me tremendous support. The pains she had taken to clarify and explain things at every stage, the efforts she had put in to make me hopefully look beyond the problem, the empathy she has shown in dealing with issues – for everyone of these, I am grateful to her.

Says my doctor; “When the sick approach the gates of the Institute weak in body and spirit, and full of fear, there is only one response you have to become part of them. “She has really become an integral part of me and I am able to feel her presence./ It is now over six years since I am leading a meaningful life, having fun with my grandchildren and also offering my services to a voluntary organization . I have not merely survived cancer, but am enjoying a qualitative life in spite of cancer. I am today fully convinced that a diagnosis of cancer is no longer an automatic death sentence, not the worst that could happen. The worst is delaying a visit to the doctor out of fear. The delay could allow for spread of the cancer, which could be dangerous.

- The lady prefers to be anonymous but from the narration, I can make a few observations. Fear of diagnosis, especially loss of an organ and that too breast is the same in all women. Being an organ that plays an important role in one's self-image and therefore in social life, being an intrinsic component of sexual / marital life, women have played a significant role in the changing scenario. Phenomenal number of multi institutional trials which investigated methodologies to conserve the breast was possible since women willingly participate in these trials.
- The evaluation has been a long drawn story. Suffice to say, “Breast Conservation” is possible today, based on eligibility criteria. It is possible only in early disease.
- Ca in situ is a pre-cancerous condition – it may take a few years to become cancer. However in a lobular carcinoma it is an indicator of a precursor lesion and the best would be a mastectomy
- Synchronous or metachronous lesions i.e. cancer occurring in both breasts at the same time or a few years apart does happen in over 10% of breast cancer patients.

## **A Home Away from Home**

**Gita Das**

I was diagnosed with breast cancer twelve years back. After the initial shock wore off, I made up my mind to remain proactive and adopt a positive attitude. While every day brought on new challenges, both mentally and physically. I always received in abundance, love and support from my family and friends. The Doctors, staff and other patients at the hospital helped me to tide over the apprehension and fears that I initially had.

I consider my

I consider myself fortunate to have undergone surgery, chemotherapy and radiation at the Cancer Institute, Adyar, Chennai. Ever since then, I thank God for having opened for me the right avenue in seeking a cure for my illness...; or... I was completely bowled over and overwhelmed by the devotion, care and commitment extended by doctors, nursing personnel, workers and the administrative staff towards all patients at this hospital; I was reminded of the words of Lord Buddha “A generous heart, kind speech, and a life of service and compassion are the things which renew humanity”.

How significant are these words in connection with this Institute!!! I believe that in some way that contributed to my speedy recovery and cure.

Now, once again as a patient, I am entering the portals of the amazing Institute, the feelings are still the same. Little has changed since then. The hospital goes on carrying on its charitable and benevolent activities. My fear of cancer having recurred again is dispelled by the familiar loving faces still to be found in this wonderful place. It felt like a second home-coming!!! I know I am in for a cure once again, because what a patient needs most – love – is there in abundance here ...believe me it's not for me alone. Unconditional love is doled out in plenty, free and for all, irrespective of religion, language, or money. You only have to look around to seek it. If you look beyond yourself and your ailments you will see concern and love reflecting and radiating in the faces of the administrative staff, the doctors, nurses and sometimes even the patients themselves --- a great camaraderie. All those, who in one way or the other, have been associated with the hospital or left the hospital by personal choice have taken with them a little of this love and spirit of selfless service to where they are now. Some faces I once knew and loved, are no longer there but the ethos of the Hospital has not changed one wee bit. The spirit of dedication and service is what makes this hospital a one-in-a- million kind.

At the helm of everything is of course, the petite, charming gracious lady (a demi-God to me, many more will echo my sentiments) the charismatic Chairman of the Institute, Dr Shanta. Listing out her many qualities is endless – the adjectives barely sufficient – I'll just sum it up in one word – Philanthropist par excellence!

Needless to say this great quality of “others before self” has permeated the whole hospital, the old and the new. Despite the large, sometimes unmanageable crowds that keep thronging in, there is never a rude word uttered, or a frown mirrored on the faces of administrative staff, the Doctors the nurses there. “Service with a Smile” is the motto followed to the T by this institution.

“I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.” This quote by Rabindranath Tagore is definitely the dictum followed here.

I was overwhelmed with emotion when I saw many under privileged and marginalized sections of society getting free and subsidized treatment here. The children in the Pediatric ward, affected by bone and blood cancer, can be seen running around happily with a smile on their faces, oblivious of the pain and complications of the chemotherapy. The free treatment given to them, coupled with the love and care administered by the nurses and Doctors ensures that they be given a chance to find a disease-free future for themselves... a better tomorrow. There are many anecdotes and experiences of other patients, narrated to me, in my long association with the hospital which further goes to prove that at the Cancer Institute, patient care is the first priority. Kudos to the great Institute!!!

I fervently hope that more resources will come pouring in from Corporate houses and big business concerns, for here is a deserving Institute that is making giant leaps in its war against cancer.

Personally speaking, can has definitely made me a better person helped me to live life to the fullest, has given me the confidence to take risks, and to believe in the vision and mission of the Cancer Institute “Serving humanity is akin to serving God”.

- All cancer memories start with an emotion of panic and fear which persists through the period of treatment. There is significant change in the alt...based on the recovery process and the support one gets from the family and as importantly, confidence that the attending physician is able to instill.
- Mrs. Gita Das had a positive approach to the disease and was very well for over 12 years when it relapsed. The confidence born out of her earlier experience has made it possible for her to meet the unexpected encounter without panic.
- Comments: “In breast cancer, no two cancers are alike. Although a few prognostic markers are available, there are no specific individual predictive of prognostic markers which will say this patient will respond or not, who will relapse etc.
- Gene profiling is unexpected to answer many of these challenging areas that will be an era of personalized medicine – may be in the coming 16 years.
- Late relapses as in this case can occur in about 10-12% of patients.