

VOLUME 1 • ISSUE 2 • JULY-DECEMBER 2021

Print ISSN: 2772-8382

Online ISSN: 2772-8390

Annals of ONCOLOGY RESEARCH and THERAPY

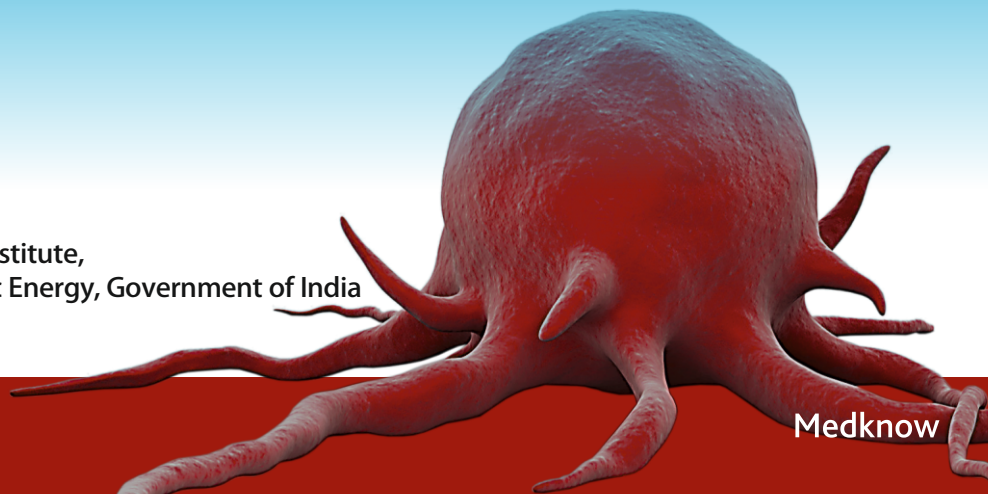
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An Official Publication of Dr B Borooah Cancer Institute,
A Grant In-Aid Institute of Department of Atomic Energy, Government of India
and A Unit of Tata Memorial Centre, Mumbai.

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My experience

It was a normal weekend in the life of a full time professional in the year 2009, when, after breakfast I sat down to look at the school work of my daughter. The sudden visit of “*Shanta*” who used to massage my children when they were young brought a smile to my face as my shoulders cried for her comforting hands.

A few strokes by her skilled hands were starting to bring relief to my shoulders when she decided to take a pull from the front and noticed a lump in my breast. With that lump started a journey which completely overturned my life!

The diagnosis of cancer in my breast brought numbness initially, leading to confusion as none of the text book causes of breast cancer applied to me. A lumpectomy surgery, then mastectomy and finally chemotherapy for the triple-negative Stage 3 cancer made me explore my body and my mind like never before.

Since the physical and the psychological pain after the first chemotherapy became unbearable, I turned to painting. I decided to paint a canvas reflecting my mental state after each chemo. Not only this activity gave me a tool to vent my pain, but it also helped me understand my emotions in a better way. Dealing with the side effects became much easier. I painted eight canvasses during my treatment and named the series *Towards Satori...* (*Satori* is the Japanese word for *Samadhi*).

Looking back at this series I realized that this whole journey of treatment of cancer became a spiritual journey for me.

When I completed all my sessions of chemotherapy and regained my senses, I visited the doctor to know what next?

“What medicines do I need to take now?” I asked my doctor.

“No medicines, you are now cancer free,”

“I am so grateful to you for that but what medicines do I need to take to keep myself free of cancer?” I still pestered him.

After all, I had heard about people having recurrences and that fear was uppermost on my mind now. “There are no medicines to keep the recurrence under check.

You just have to be careful with your timely check-ups,” the doctor said.

I was happy, very happy, that I was cured of a life-threatening disease that I no longer needed to go through that gruesome treatment protocol. However, the same question persisted in my mind-what efforts should I make to keep myself cancer free or at least reduce its chances of recurrence in times to come?

Looks like becoming cancer free is one thing and remaining cancer free is another, I thought to myself.

In my quest to remain cancer free, I started my own journey of self-exploration. My biggest question to myself was “What led me to having cancer in my body? Why and how I had compromised my immunity to this extent that a life-threatening disease took over my body?” I explored the answer to this question in the book that I landed up writing called “*Fragrance of a wild soul.*”

In this book, I sought answers and a pattern of questioning the self-appeared:

- How my urge to nurture others led me to get undernourished to an extent that I created a hollow inside me?
- How I understood that my suppressed self-led me to abuse my body, soul and mind?
- How a catastrophic experience like cancer made me see the splits in my soul and gave me an opportunity to mend it for myself.

The blossoming of the pure self, then losing it and finally mending it-sewing it back, bit by bit, by self-analysis towards an even stronger self and a free spirit is the ride of this story.

We all have our own cancers, even if they have not become tumors as yet.

How can we heal ourselves and come out of our self-created pits and discover our infinite potential is the purpose of telling this story.

This journey also made me realize the meaning of life, the purpose of my existence and it also made me realize that it is possible to overcome any crisis in life, provided you deal with it with the right attitude.

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While going through my treatment I would see thousands of poor people going through a similar journey as mine and I would always ponder as to how they go through this challenging experience without any of the resources that I had.

Holding their hand and providing them with everything that they would need to win the battle with cancer became my dream. Helping them come out of this experience scar free and to operate at a much higher level than ever before and lead a fulfilled life became my purpose. With this resolve in me was born "Sanjeevani life Beyond Cancer" in 2012 which presently works in 17 centers across 12 states in India and has worked with more than 3 lakh patients through its various Flagship programs;

CanSahyogi-Providing Psycho-social Support to Cancer Patients

The teams (mix of counselors and trained cancer survivors) placed in superspecialty cancer hospitals help navigate patients through the numerous fronts that open up during their journey with cancer and its onerous treatment.

Post Coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) handholding and counseling made available over call too.

Satori – A Holistic Wellness Initiative for Patients

Focusing on holistic well-being of patients, the intervention is designed to improve physical and mental strengths, thus improving their immunity and quality of life and hopefully reducing the chances of recurrence of the disease.

Post-COVID-19, the program is also offered online.

CanSaarthi-Skill Development Program

This 4-month Certificate Course in Onco Caregiving is targeted to train cancer survivors (or those touched with cancer in family) to become trained caregivers, besides raising the bar of cancer care this helps in

opening up possible opportunities of employment for them.

Post-COVID-19, the program has been migrated to phi-gital format.

Can-Chetna-A Mass Awareness Initiative

These are Mass Contact Programs to create the awareness about healthy lifestyle to build immunity and thus avoid the incidence of cancer.

The dedicated teams in main cities hold awareness programs to motivate and encourage people to learn and talk about cancer, its symptoms, debilitating effects, and also healthy lifestyles that can be adopted. The programs also stress upon the need for regular self-screening thus leading to early detection.

Post-COVID-19, the program is also offered in phi-gital format.

Can Ahaar – Nutritional Supplement Program for Under Privileged Cancer Patients

To help patients meet their nutritional needs by providing them, essential nutrition boxes is the sole objective of this program.

The Nutritional Supplement Box provided under the CanAhaar Program is a specially crafted one containing mixed nuts, Jaggery, puffed rice, chikki, turmeric and spices (cinnamon, clove, and peppercorns) to meet the nutritional needs of patients.

Can Vaarta – Conversations around Cancer

Advocacy and Awareness programs with policy-makers and communities.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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Access this article online	
Quick Response Code: 	Website: www.aort.info
	DOI: 10.4103/aort.aort_22_21

How to cite this article: Ahluwalia R. My experience. Ann Oncol Res Ther 2021;1:68-70.

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