



After Mom Dies of Cancer, Army Man Spends 27 Years Giving Free Healthcare to 38,000

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CANCER MAHARASHTRA

When Sultana Sheikh learnt that her breast cancer treatment would go into lakhs she refused to get any medical attention. Even after her husband who works as an electrician assured her that he would arrange the money and give her the best possible care, her answer did not change.

“It was probably the guilt of making my entire family suffer emotionally and financially that made me believe that it was better to die than spend lakhs on surgeries that didn’t guarantee a healthy life,” Sultana, in her late 30s, tells **The Better India**.

Sultana is one of the millions who suffer silently. Caught at the crossroads of expensive healthcare in private and inadequate healthcare services in public hospitals. India’s healthcare system has a stark difference, the private hospitals provide excellent albeit expensive qualitative medicare and government hospitals struggle to even ensure enough medical staff.

Accessibility and affordability with respect to basic health care is something that the poor in our country is still striving for. Thus, patients like Sultana stand invisible in the grand scheme of medical care in India.

Against this backdrop, Pune’s Care India Medical Society (CIMS) is doing stellar work in treating terminally ill cancer patients free of cost.



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It was one of Sultana's family members who suggested that she try Vishranti, "When I got to know it's for free, I had many apprehensions. But, I was surprised to see the excellent care provided by the medical staff. I am grateful to CIMS for looking after my and my family's needs," says Sultana, who has undergone chemotherapy at Vishranti.

In the Memory of A Mother Who Lost her Fight with Cancer

CIMS was started in 1993 by Colonel (Retd) N S Nyayapathi and his wife, Dr Madhuri Kavoori (an Anaesthetist) in the aftermath of an insoluble loss.

In 1989, Col Nyayapathi lost his mother to kidney cancer. Her excruciating pain and suffering pushed the colonel to take premature retirement in his 40s from the Indian army and explore how qualitative healthcare worked in America and the United Kingdom.

"It was a devastating period for me when my mother passed away. Despite giving her the best of medical attention, she succumbed to the disease. I could not even begin to fathom about patients who cannot afford or access such care. The thought pushed me to start an affordable alternative for cancer patients in India," Col Nyayapathi recalls in a conversation with **The Better India**.

"I learnt a lot from my extensive research on ways to treat cancer while visiting hospitals and meeting health practitioners in UK and USA. Some of the biggest learnings were in early detection strategies, preventive measures and palliative care were All that was missing in India back in the 90s. Beyond chemotherapy and surgeries, a lot more is needed in patient care like pain management, nursing and supportive care, emotional and psychological support and so on," the 78-year-old informs.

Armed with the knowledge he had gained, he and his wife began their journey to make cancer treatment affordable for Indians and bring the discussion on this disease to the forefront.

From A Room to A Hospital



Starting any initiative from scratch is never easy and sustaining it is even harder, something that Col Nyayapathi knows first hand.

The husband-wife duo rented a small room in Pune and with just one table and chair started their health centre.

Through various channels of communication, they sourced a list of people who were fighting with cancer in the city. Under their first Sat Seva programme, they went from door-to-door offering and providing palliative care to these patients in December 1994.

The couple began their days in the wee hours of the morning to cover as many houses as possible in the city. To save money for the necessary equipment and pay rent of their small office room, Dr Madhuri would often end up taking public transport. Easy said than done as the determined lady carried all necessary paraphernalia along with her!

“She would carry a water mattress weighing seven kilos for the patients and her medical kit. She made as many as 14 rounds on some days. We were lucky to finally receive a rickshaw in donation by a good Samaritan,” Col Nyayapathi recalls.

Dr Madhuri would provide free cancer diagnostic and therapeutic services to poor patients, military orphans and war widows at their homes.

Slowly, with the help family, friends and philanthropists, they expanded the reach of their rented room to what CIMS is now.

What makes CIMS a unique healthcare unit is that even today health experts and social workers deliver doorstep services to registered patients.

For instance, once a doctor administers oral morphine to a patient to ease the pain, they monitor the patient for the next ten days until the patient develops tolerance towards any side effects.



CIMS also counsels and trains the families of the patients on how to handle the psychological and emotional stress of handling a person fighting cancer.

Over a period of time, the duo also established other projects like Matruseva (health maintenance programme for women), and CANTREAT (therapeutic services) in Vishranti.

The CIMS trust bears the cost of running all these projects, the purchase and maintenance of necessary machines like ultrasound, MRI, PET-CT, machines that run tumour marker tests, X-rays, and endoscopy.

“Our yearly expenditures are in crores and often we struggle to meet them. We had started out without any infrastructure and back then we had only one resolve that no one should go through terrible pain. That resolve is helping us overcome financial challenges even now,” he says.

End Goal – Defeating Cancer, Spreading Smiles



Giving an insight into how Vishranti is different from a regular hospital, Dr Ashok, who has been working at CIMS for the last five years, says:

“The aim is to make patients pain free and make them as comfortable as possible with proper hygiene, food and regular checkups. From something as small as dressing to helping patients deal with depression, the doctors are in charge of everything. There are very few palliative care centres in India as it requires a lot of dedication and money to sustain them. Here we are an integral part of a patient’s entire journey and our final goal is to see them smile.”

Echoing similar sentiments, Thirumala, a Matron who has completed eleven years with the hospital, says, “We discharge the patient only once they are completely free of symptoms and illnesses. It is very satisfying to see patients after they are healed properly. This is not just a hospital for me, it is my second home. We don’t send away anyone disheartened.”

Way Forward

After giving his blood and sweat to fulfil his dream and touching thousands of lives over a period of 27 years, Col Nyayapathi is not done yet.

At an age where people focus on maintaining their health and taking rest, Col Nyayapathi is working with the same passion he had started with. In fact, he is working to spread the activities of the Trust beyond Pune.

“From spreading awareness about cancer, prompting people to go for early detection to sending trained staff in rural areas of Maharashtra for regular health checkups, we have several plans in the pipeline. I want to open around ten CIMS centres so that rural patients don’t have to travel to urban areas for healthcare,” says the man who swore to bring relief to those who suffer through what his mother once did.

To know more about CIMS click [here](#)

All photos are sourced from CIMS/[Facebook](#)

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(Edited by Saiqua Sultan)

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