

# A Certain Cure

One significant change in a family ecosystem that has extended to larger society is the notion of good health. The consequent behavioural changes and adoption of new habits related to fitness are laying a stronger foundation for the next generation. At this juncture, it is imperative to look into factors that either contribute to or become an impediment to early diagnosis and recovery from life threatening diseases. “We may have to start with a change in our own mindsets. The kinds of diseases are overwhelming and therefore people’s anxiety and irrational beliefs must be handled with awareness. Swastava Cancer Care has been trying to do this in the context of cancer care,” says Dr Vasudev Chaturvedi, Founder Secretary of Swastava Cancer Care in Hyderabad, Telangana.

Swastava Cancer Care ‘emerged out of pain of a group of people’ who were either directly or indirectly affected by cancer. “Our life experiences and the loss of dear ones not only forced us to promote early diagnosis but also come to terms with the fact that cancer is curable. We had to say it aloud to ourselves first. We didn’t want to see others paying the price we did in order to learn this,” says an emotional Vasudev, who lost his wife to Ovarian Cancer. Surviving Colon Cancer, he himself is a standing example to the promise of cancer cure.

Vasudev’s successful career in hospital management took on a new phase when he learned about his disease. He is both proud and content that his disease never changed his personality. “I was always a workaholic. I just couldn’t let surgery and chemotherapy affect my efficiency at work. It gave me the motivation to remain organised and committed. Having lost my wife, all these occupations helped cope with the need for companionship, but never made up for what I missed in my life. I wanted to do as much as I can to stop others from going through what I did,” shares this poignant sexagenarian.

Founded in 2016, Vasudev and team at Swastava Cancer Care gave a serious thought to women above 30 years of age as they felt that women’s health was not an immediate priority in rural families. High rate of prevalence of cancer among Telangana women was also a caveat that forced them to look into women and the cancer they were vulnerable to. “Whether we accept or not, we all know the treatment given to women’s health in all social classes,” laments Vasudev, who feels that women are the most denied community within families.

Awareness is a key component of Swastava Cancer Care’s field presence and intervention. Reaching out to remote rural areas where people hardly know



anything about cancer was an urgent need because unless aware, they consulted doctors only in final stages where no medical help could promise recovery. “Cancer is curable. We cannot let them die because of their ignorance. It is a responsibility to create awareness and we are on to it,” he says with commitment. Vasudev explains that three forms of cancer are more prevalent among Telangana women – cervical, oral and breast cancer. “When educated people do not know about self-examination of breasts, what can we expect from uneducated masses? We have a huge responsibility,” he insists.

Supported by its network of hospitals and medical colleges, Swastava Cancer Care has established itself as a bridge that connects people needing treatment and the source of treatment. Awareness campaign in the villages is soon followed by a screening camp where tests are administered. Based on the results women are advised further diagnostics and medical treatment is offered at hospitals that are associated with the organisation. On an average, Vasudev says that six to seven percent cases are suspected in every camp of which two percent are proven to be suffering from one form of cancer.

Awareness is a holistic process and timely diagnosis is only one end to it. There are other significant outcomes and the team’s intention is to reach the young and empower them with correct information. Educating our youngsters about substance abuse, menstrual and sexual hygiene is as critical as educating them about food and nutrition. “We must nudge their behaviour towards good health as early as possible. Their diversions and temptations need to be put in perspective so that they can make their

We may have to start with a change in our own mindsets. The kinds of diseases are overwhelming and therefore people’s anxiety and irrational beliefs must be handled with awareness. Swastava Cancer Care has been trying to do this in the context of cancer care.



**“A crucial step forward can come from the state or central government by introducing vaccines to prevent cervical cancer in girls/women.**

right choice,” he says.

Swastava Cancer Care is now promoting the concept of ‘no tobacco school’ where the entire school administration takes an oath to prevent tobacco reaching their premises. This effort received a new impetus when the Government of Telangana decided to collaborate with Swastava Cancer Care to organise awareness programmes in Government Higher Secondary Schools in Hyderabad and Sangareddy districts. “This is a big recognition for us! Building cancer ambassadors in every school, training teachers who can take the message forward to future batches will certainly reach out to a large student population. Such collaborations strengthen our resolve to widen our horizon and reiterate our responsibility,” he shares.

The Swastava team also takes efforts to present its work and perspective at significant gatherings like the SAARC Federation of Oncologists’ Conference in Bhutan and NCC camps in Telangana and

Andhra Pradesh. They feel that every platform is a promise to let people know the value of prevention, early diagnosis and available treatments. Their commitment has taken them to more than 95 villages in 12 districts of Telangana where they have organised 2042 awareness sessions covering 14,962 children, youth and women. Screening camps in 21 villages have benefitted more than 400 women.

“It all began when I hardly knew anything about management of non-profit organisations. I recently completed the yearlong programme on Social Entrepreneurship and NGO Management from CSIM Hyderabad. Before the course I was ashamed of asking for help. I wrote tenders and earned so much personally but building resources for a cause proved to be difficult. I have now gained the confidence to seek help for my cause. I have learnt the modalities of fund raising. I have built a network of like-minded doctors and entrepreneurs. We all know the value of marching together for a cause,” shares Vasudev.

He feels that all these efforts are focussed on the reach their resources promised. A crucial step forward can come from the state or central government by introducing vaccines to prevent cervical cancer in girls/women. “It must be given in two shots in a gap of two months before girls reach 18 years of age. Unaffordable for the masses, only government’s intervention can make the difference and save our next generation from cervical cancer. We know the imminent threat and the solution too. Is it not wise that we do what we can?” he quips, adding that the responsibility is on all our shoulders.

**Shammuga Priya.T**