

Will to Live not a Battle to Survive

Wednesday 20 March, 2019

The word CANCER to me was fear, grief and the end of life when I heard it for the first time in 2006. Never knew a six letter word would change my life and my upcoming years in a far-reaching way. This story encompasses not fear but hope, not grief but happiness, not the end of life but the start of a new one.

I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma at the age of 52 in July 2006 and had my world crashing down. I had to undergo surgery followed by chemotherapy for nearly 6 months. I fully recovered from my illness and was back to my normal life, playing badminton every day for an hour and working as an insurance manager.

My life came to a standstill again in 2010 when I was diagnosed with Ovarian Cancer. I am amongst one in hundred thousand cases who has suffered from two different types of cancers within a span of 5 years. During my dose dense treatment, I was admitted to intensive care for malaria and doctors had given up at one stage with 24 hours to live.

During my stay in intensive care, there was one thing in my mind which was a Will to Live not a Battle to Survive. I lived through intensive care and completed surgery/chemotherapy for next 6 months and was in remission till December 2011. Unfortunately, I have had multiple recurrences of Ovarian cancer starting in 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018; for which, I had abdominal de-bulking surgery in 2014 and only chemotherapy in 2012, 2016 & 2018. I was lucky to get imported medicine Olaparib through Expanded Access program of AstraZenca which kept me cancer free for about 2 years from 2016 to 2018. Having gone through so much I do wonder how much a body can cope with, but for my family, I am ready to take these treatments in stride.

So here I am living with Hodgkin's lymphoma and Ovarian cancer with multiple recurrences; 3 surgeries, heart failure & 50 rounds of chemotherapy during the last 14 years. My body has slowed down but not my mind; which still wants to enjoy the smallest moments of life. I had never imagined in 2006 that I would get a chance to see my grandchildren, and fourteen years down the line life is currently busy with them at my side. A positive attitude has helped me go through the pain barriers these during treatments; so never lose hope and keep fighting. I have traveled more of the world since my diagnosis which has changed my perspective about life and death.

As a cancer survivor, I would expect you to go through phases of depression, pain, and helplessness, but acceptance of these circumstances is the key factor for better control of your life. It is extremely important to be aware of your disease and what new treatments are available within the world. It is crucial to maintain a good quality of life during your cancer treatment and sometimes it means deciding your own future like rejecting a complex surgery for only chemotherapy or stopping chemotherapy and going for other advanced targeted therapies/ immunotherapies. It is also important to talk about cancer within the peer group as it increases awareness but may end up saving someone else's life through early detection. Liaising with supportive oncologist forms the core of treatment while maintaining a good quality of life. I am lucky to be under the care of Dr. Boman Dhabhar, Mumbai and Dr. R. Kristeleit in London. I also hope that in the future, the Government of India would bring a single policy framework for cancer patients as they are physically, mentally, socially and financially affected due to the long duration of treatments and recovery.

There have been lots of ups and downs during diagnosis, treatment and recovery but one goal that REMAINS is a

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