



The Optimist

A Publication of the Indian American Cancer Network (IACAN)

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The Indian American Cancer Network is a 501(c) nonprofit cancer resource organization whose mission is to serve the South Asian community through education, resources, and support for those affected by cancer. Catering to South Asians unique psycho-social and cultural needs, IACAN works at providing South Asians with the opportunity to reduce their cancer risk by maintaining a healthy lifestyle and ensuring that no South Asian travels the cancer journey alone.

A Message from the President

True to the spirit of “The Optimist”, the year 2023 began with great enthusiasm and hope as two bone marrow drives, simultaneously organized at Houston and Dallas in collaboration with our partner the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP) on January 1 st 2023, successfully registered more than 250 new donors to the Bone Marrow Registry. IACAN’s outreach activities energized by our new Board members have led to new partnerships with community organizations, increasing awareness and connectivity in society, and creating channels to serve more cancer patients and caregivers. The current issue of The OPTIMIST details the events that IACAN has hosted and supported over the last several months and I hope you will enjoy reading it. We are here to support you, so please reach out to us and give us the opportunity to serve you.

Ronald Abraham, President, IACAN

IACAN Fundraiser 2022- You Can with IACAN

The Indian American Cancer Network (IACAN), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, has been providing culturally tailored services to people of South Asian origin locally, nationally, and internationally for more than a decade. IACAN’s programs and services are geared towards cancer prevention and creating a supportive environment for those affected by cancer. You Can with IACAN!

On September 10, 2022, IACAN hosted its fundraiser gala at the Sugar Creek Country Club in Sugarland, Texas. The theme of this year’s gala was “Support,” and the goal of the gala was to raise funds for IACAN’s initiatives that include preventive cancer screening, marrow drive, survivors and caregivers, mind-body healing yoga program, and South Asian cancer health research. The gala was energized by the very skillful host, Ms. Pooja Lodhia. The evening began with the traditional lighting of the lamps by the founding board members of IACAN. This was followed by celebrating 75 years of India’s independence through the rendition of the US national anthem led by Niyati Jain (Clements High School choir team) and the Indian National Anthem led by Dr. Shamik Bose and Mrs. Vaishnavi Bakhta. Dr. Monalisa Chandra, IACAN president, delivered the welcome speech, which was followed by an interactive keynote address by Dr. Marina George, Vice President, Inpatient Medical Operations at the UT MD Anderson Cancer Center wherein she emphasized the practice of thinking out of the ordinary to realize and address the needs of cancer patients.

The Special Guest of the evening was Dr. Stephen J. Spann, the Founding Dean of the Tilman J. Fertitta Family College of Medicine and Vice-President of Medical Affairs at the University of Houston. In his address, Dr. Spann emphasized the importance of “hope” and “compassion” in the healing and treatment of cancer patients. Dr. Lorenzo Cohen, Richard E. Hayes Distinguished Professor in Clinical Cancer Prevention, UT MD Anderson Cancer Center, was awarded the Lifetime Service Award for his contribution to cancer prevention research and education. IACAN also recognized the cancer survivors and their caregivers, and bone marrow donors. Mr. Yusuf Khan, a first-year medical student at UT Health Science Center in San Antonio, was awarded the Youth Leadership Award for his advocacy in enabling the passage of H.B. 780 bill into law, which will increase bone marrow registration across Texas. IACAN was recognized for its outstanding community service by Honorable Members of the U.S. Congress, Congressman Troy Nehls and Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthy.

The gala attendees were also entertained by an exemplary presentation of “Jugalbandi” (or musical duet) of Hindustani classical music and Carnatic classical music by Dr. Shamik Bose, Ms. Vaishnavi Bakhta, Mr. Nishaad Kanhere, and Mr. Abhishek Iyer. The laughter yoga by Reverend Stephen Findley left the attendees in splits. The charity auction hosted by Dr. Subodh Bhuchar raised a significant amount of money for the different IACAN initiatives. IACAN would like to thank everyone who contributed to IACAN’s success and the success of the gala including all speakers, donors, sponsors, musicians, guests, honorees, IACAN’s founding members and advisory board members, and media partners.

Shilpa Ghurye, IACAN BOARD

Breast Cancer Prevention: Barriers in South Asian Community

October was the month of Breast cancer awareness. On that occasion, IACAN partnered with the Open Forum (Radio 103.5, HUM FM) to raise awareness of breast cancer prevention on October 1st, 2022. Dr. Subodh Bhuchar hosted the event, and the guests included Dr. Nina Tamirisa (IACAN Medical Advisory Board; Breast Surgical Oncology, MD Anderson), Dr. Sarfaraz Saddrudin (Radiologist, The Rose), and Ashma Khanani Moosa (Vice President, IACAN; breast cancer survivor). The conversation focused on the clinical aspect of breast cancer cultural and structural barriers associated with breast cancer and prevention in the South Asian community.

Ashma Khanani Moosa, IACAN Board

Gastric Cancer Prevention- Ways to Healthy Living

November 2022 was Gastric Cancer awareness month. For the second educational session in the second half of 2022, IACAN partnered with Open Forum on November 12th, 2022 to discuss healthy living and gastric cancer prevention with Dr. Subodh Buchar and Jagat Kamdar.

The speakers were Dr. Nabil Tariq (Bariatric Surgeon, Houston Methodist) and Mitali Paul (IACAN Advisory Board member, Surgery Administrator, Houston Methodist). They shared that cancer incidence has increased, especially as we live longer. 30-40% of cancers are lifestyle-related, obesity being amongst the highest contributing factors. Higher risks of breast, ovarian, GI, colon, and pancreatic cancer is associated with obesity. For instance, a 5-point BMI (body mass index) increase could increase esophageal/gastric cancer risk by 40%, endometrial cancer by 50%, post-menopausal breast cancer by 12%, or kidney cancer by 50%. Sugar intake is also associated with cancer incidence. Nutrition, diet, and food behavior counseling help with long-term lifestyle

changes and weight loss management. Dr. Tariq described the different types of metabolic surgeries and how they can help. Some drugs can aid with satiety to make one feel “full.”

Including a good portion of nuts in one’s diet significantly reduces cancer risk. Increasing physical activity, eating a healthful diet that is plant-based and more fruits and vegetables, limiting alcohol consumption and smoking, and limiting the intake of red meats and sugary drinks, promote overall health. Sleep hygiene and stress management and improved interpersonal relationships also promote overall well-being reducing cancer risk. Colonoscopy and endoscopy are preventive diagnostics that can help detect lesions leading to gastric cancer.

Mitali talked about her involvement with IACAN as a founding and advisory board member, and about the organization’s impact and involvement in the South Asian community not only in the greater Houston area but across the globe. Subodh was impressed with the success of the recent fundraising IACAN gala held in October. He encouraged listeners to get involved, seek help and engage with IACAN.

Mitali Paul, IACAN Advisory Board

IACAN’s Annual Volunteer and Partner Luncheon

IACAN’s operations are possible only because of its volunteers, partners, and collaborators. Like every year, we celebrated the spirit of volunteering and collaboration on December 4th at the India Summers, Sugarland. The volunteers, community partners, and collaborators joined in celebrating the success of 2022 and ushering New Year 2023. We were also joined by the team from the Department of Health Disparity Research, UTMD Anderson who shared the research findings of a study on Asian American Cancer Needs. IACAN was a community partner in that study. The luncheon also included reflections on past events and achievements in 2022 and updated plans for 2023. The outgoing President, Dr. Monalisa Chandra introduced the new Executive Board that will be led by the incoming President Mr. Ronald Abraham. The highlight of the event was charades and Antakshari hosted by Drs. Shikha Khatri and Shilpa Ghurye.



Welcome new members on TEAM IACAN

We welcome the new leadership and the new Executive Board. The current members of the Executive Board include:

- President- Ronald Abraham
- Vice President- Dr. Shikha Khatri
- Secretary- Sushant Jain
- Treasurer- Dipika Varia
- Joint treasurer- Janaki Nanjappa
- Health Policy Officer- Dr. Shilpa Ghurye
- Patient Navigator- Mital Bramhabhatt

We also welcome the following new members to the IACAN Advisory Board:

- Shibu Varghese
- Dr. Sanjay Shete
- Susmita Gupta

Upcoming events

Please find the information on the upcoming events:

- Jan 29th, 2023- IACAN marrow drive at IFAIR: Jai Jawan Jai Kisan, a celebration of the Republic day of India by the Indian Cultural Center
- Feb 11th, 2023- An educational seminar in collaboration with the Jain Society of Houston on Colorectal Cancer: Prevention, Diagnosis, and Treatment by Dr. Amit Agarwal, Memorial Hermann Hospital System. Please register at <https://bit.ly/JSHIACAN2023> to attend the event
- March 2023- IACAN's Annual Music Concert for Survivors. Details coming soon
- April 22nd, 2023- Celebrating EARTH's Day through Education on Cancer and Environment. Details coming soon

Information on each program will be available on the [IACAN website](#) and [Facebook](#).