

IACAN is a 501(c) nonprofit cancer resource organization whose mission is to serve the South Asian community through education, resources, and support of those affected by cancer. The vision of IACAN is that every South Asian reduces their cancer risk by maintaining a healthy lifestyle and that no South Asian travels the cancer journey alone.

## A Message from the President

Building on the enthusiastic start to 2023, IACAN, in partnership with the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP) has successfully added hundreds of potential donors to the registry and reached out to new communities of the greater Houston area in its mission to educate and promote cancer awareness. We have partnered with SVYASA, Houston to provide top-quality yoga practice to our survivors and caregivers through the biannual Mind Body Healing Yoga program. We are happy to report that our improved digital presence via LinkedIn, social media, and a rejuvenated website have increased community engagement.

In this issue of *The Optimist*, we highlight IACAN's outreach efforts over the past six months, and I hope you enjoy reading about our work. IACAN is here to support the community, so please reach out if you need our help.



Ronald Abraham

## Colorectal Cancer Seminar: Prevention, Diagnosis, and Treatment



IACAN's first educational seminar, *Colorectal cancer Screening and Surveillance Methodologies*, was on February 11, 2023. The event was in collaboration with the Jain Society of Houston and Memorial Hermann Hospital System. 1 in 23 men and 1 in 25 women are at risk of developing colorectal cancer (CRC) in their lifetime. Timely screening can prevent CRC by identifying and removing precancerous polyps or finding colorectal cancer early, when it is easier to treat. Unfortunately, the screening rate in Texas (62%) is low, which puts Texans at increased risk for CRC. Dr. Amit Agarwal, the key speaker, elucidated the risks, the role of screening in prevention, and the treatment of CRC. In addition, the discussion included the perceived stigma and fear associated with CRC screening. The session was attended by multiple cancer survivors and individuals who were age eligible for CRC screening, whose questions on the perceived stigma and fear associated with CRC screening was addressed in detail by Dr. Agarwal. The event ended with the recitation of slokas and a dance presentation by the young members of Jain society.

-Monalisa Chandra, IACAN

## IACAN in Health Research



The IACAN health research program was conceived to provide empirical evidence to the South Asian cancer health literature and to inform the development of IACAN's various programs. Since 2017, IACAN and other Asian organizations in Houston have collaborated with UT MD Anderson Cancer Center (UTMDACC) on a research project involving Asian American cancer health needs. The study findings were presented at the Asian American Health Summit 2019, and were published in February 2023 in *Progress in Community Health Partnerships: Research, Education, and Action* (John Hopkins University Press).

Recently, IACAN participated in a breast cancer, survey-based study with Rice University students Shonik Ganjoo, Soumya Somani, and Shivani Kulkarni, and UTMDACC. The study analyzed the contribution of demographic, psychosocial, and sociocultural factors to breast cancer screening in eligible Asian Indian women. The result of the study revealed low mammogram adherence in the population and a significant association with stigma and other sociocultural barriers. IACAN will use the findings of this study to develop culturally-adapted,

evidence-based interventions that will address the disparities in breast cancer screening rates in our community. The findings of

this initiative were published in Rice at Large (Office of Public Affairs) at Rice University and presented by the students at the Center for Civic Leadership Showcase.

-Monalisa Chandra, IACAN

### A Liltng Lyrical Luncheon



IACAN hosted its annual music concert honoring cancer survivors and caregivers on April 2, 2023, at The Club, Aliana. The audience was treated to the melodious voices of virtuoso Mani Sastry, Mr. Ravi Mukkamala, and two very talented students of the Naada Vinoda Music Academy, Karthik Kommineni and Sraavani Poluri.

The benefits of music therapy in improving mood and reducing stress and anxiety in cancer patients are well-documented. However, when the chosen songs are familiar and meaningful, able to instinctively bond you to others in the room while simultaneously transporting you to the days of yore, these benefits feel magically amplified. The energy and magic in the room were palpable thanks to the performers who connected deeply with the audience and used their music to evoke a wide range of emotions. Of special mention is Karthik's rendition of "Naatu Naatu" from the movie RRR. This high-energy dance number got the crowd moving and created a lively and festive atmosphere.

The attendees were treated to a scrumptious, multi-course lunch from Nirmanz that was yet another treat for the senses, albeit different senses. The feast was a hit and everyone who attended had nothing but praise for the food.

Overall, this IACAN event helped to build a sense of community and was a reminder that even amid a challenging journey, there is still beauty, hope, and support to be found.

*"Happiness can be found, even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light."* – Dumbledore (J.K. Rowling)  
-Shikha Khatri, IACAN

### IACAN's Marrow Program



IACAN's second educational outreach focused on our Marrow Program on Indo-American News Radio on Saturday, April 15, 2023. Be The Match Member Enrollment Coordinator and IACAN advisory board member, Mrs. Gaytri Kapoor, and IACAN past President, Dr. Monalisa Chandra, discussed the need for marrow/stem cell donor registration in the South Asian community and what the process entails. The speakers emphasized that marrow or stem cell donations are often the only solutions for patients diagnosed with blood cancers or disorders. However, due to various psychosocial barriers, bone marrow or stem cell donation registration in the community remains low, putting blood cancer and blood disorder patients at risk. The perceived stigma associated with donation includes a lack of knowledge of the marrow/stem cell donation process, its safety and side effects, and the religious beliefs associated with organ donation. The IACAN - Be The Match partnership of the past decade has been dedicated to raising awareness about the need for marrow donation and facilitating donor registration in the South Asian community.

-Monalisa Chandra, IACAN



In keeping with our mission to save lives via a robust marrow/stem cell donor registry, IACAN has sponsored and co-hosted several drives at various social and religious events in 2023. Tabulated below are the **403 potential donors** registered at the various events.

-Shikha Khatri, IACAN

Date	Event/Location	Potential donors registered at the event
1-Jan-23	Karya Siddhi Hanuman Temple, Frisco, TX	200
1-Jan-23	Sri Meenakshi Devasthanam, Pearland, TX	100
14-Jan-23	Houston Maharashtra Mandal's Makar Sankranti Event, Katy, TX	7
29-Jan-23	ICC IFAIR 2023, GSH Event Center, Bellaire, TX	2
19-Feb-23	Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Jayanti, GSH Event Center, Bellaire, TX	7
25-Mar-23	Ugadi celebrations, Cypress, TX	7
1-Apr-23	NASHA XVI, U of H, TX	77
15-Apr-23	Pura Nava, Pearland Towne Center, Pearland, TX	3

## IACAN Commemorates Cancer Survivorship Month and the International Day of Yoga



In honor of Cancer Survivorship Month and the International Day of Yoga, IACAN organized a special radio show highlighting the benefits of yoga for cancer survivors. This event was held in collaboration with Open Forum Houston, 103.5 Hum FM Radio, and was hosted by Dr. Subodh Bhuchar, Jagat Kamdar, and Dinkar Chheda on Saturday at 5:00 PM.

During the show, Ms. Smitha Mallaiah, a Yoga Therapist and researcher at M D Anderson, eloquently discussed the advantages of incorporating yoga into cancer care. She shared valuable insights into managing the side effects of cancer treatment throughout the entire care continuum, from diagnosis to survivorship. Smitha explained the mechanisms through which yoga positively impacts the sympathetic nervous system, HPA axis, and other physiological processes. Additionally, she highlighted the research supporting the benefits of yoga for both patients and caregivers, acknowledging the stress and fear often experienced by families in such situations.

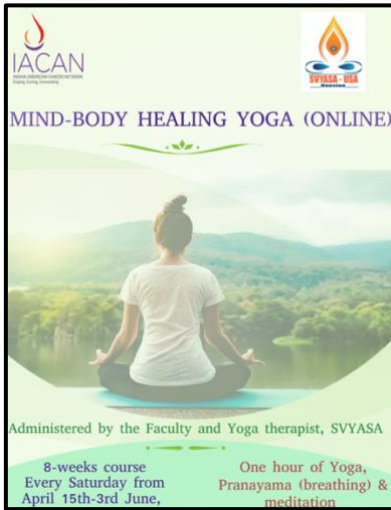
To provide a firsthand perspective, Radha Dixit, a 13-year cancer survivor and active community/IACAN volunteer, shared her journey. She recounted the initial shock of diagnosis, the subsequent challenges, and her successful navigation of the cancer experience by adopting a multi-dimensional approach encompassing medical care, family support, and the incorporation of yoga to manage treatment side effects. Radha emphasized the transformative power of yoga, not only as a physical practice but as a way of life. She encouraged other cancer patients within the Indian/South Asian community to seek support and assistance when needed.

The conversation concluded by underscoring the significance of regular yoga practice for maintaining overall health and preventing illness. The event served as a reminder of the profound impact that yoga can have on the well-being of cancer survivors and their loved ones. IACAN offers a free Mind-Body healing program for cancer patients in collaboration with SVYASA Houston.

Overall, the radio show organized by IACAN shed light on the importance of yoga in cancer care, offering valuable insights and inspiring individuals to embrace this holistic practice for optimal health and well-being.

-Smitha Mallaiah, SVYASA-USA

## Spring 2023 Mind Body Healing Yoga Program



IACAN's ongoing mind and body healing yoga program aimed at improving the mental well-being of our survivors and caregivers received a boost with the cementing of our partnership with the Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana (SVYASA) to lead the biannual program with a professional certified yoga therapist. IACAN hosted this year's Spring 2023 8-week yoga program from April 15 through June 3, immediately followed by the International Day of Yoga on June 4th. Yoga and other comparative modalities are increasingly being administered to both cancer patients and survivors to ameliorate psychosocial challenges such as depression, anxiety, and stress. The practice incorporates asanas (postures), pranayama (breathing), and dhyana (mindfulness). The online sessions conducted every Saturday morning for 8 weeks benefited many survivors and their caregivers.

This free resource has been very popular in the community and IACAN is committed to continue providing this biannual program in the future. Additionally, for the first time, IACAN provided a recording to the participants to encourage them to continue the practice after the program ended on June 3rd. The next 8-week session is being planned for September-October 2023.

-Ronald Abraham, IACAN

## The International Day of Yoga 2023



IACAN commemorated the 9<sup>th</sup> International Day of Yoga on June 4, 2023, also the National Cancer Survivors Day, with a yoga routine tailored for cancer survivors followed by boxed lunch at Sugar Land Memorial Park at the Brazos River Corridor.

Smitha Mallaiah, a certified yoga therapist from SVYASA, led the yoga practice in the spacious park pavilion on a day marked by perfect weather to be outdoors. The sun was shining, the birds singing, and the air was fresh and cool. The session lasted about 1.5 hours and included a variety of yoga poses beneficial for cancer survivors. Everyone felt grateful for the opportunity to relax and de-stress with Ms. Mallaiah in such a beautiful setting.

Fort Bend County Commissioner Andy Meyers, Precinct 3, partook in the event and kindly mentioned, "I was honored to be part of the IACAN-SVYASA celebration of National Cancer Survivors Day and International Yoga Day 2023 at the Sugar Land Memorial Park. Thanks for the invitation."

-Ronald Abraham, IACAN

## Upcoming Events

Here is what to look forward to-

- IACAN's Marrow drive at ICC IFEST23 on Aug 20, 2023 at Stafford Center.
- Continuing Medical Education (CME) Event. September 2023. Details To be announced (TBA).
- Fall 2023, 8-week Mind and Body Healing Yoga with SVYASA. September-October 2023. Details TBA
- Breast Cancer Event. October 2023. Details TBA
- IACAN Volunteer Luncheon. December 2023. Details TBA

Information about our upcoming programs and events will be available on the IACAN [website](#) and [Facebook page](#).