

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. The vision of IACAN is that every Indian American reduces their cancer risk by maintaining a healthy lifestyle and that no Indian American travels the cancer journey alone.

A Message from the President

As we enter the year 2022, IACAN continues to function with an indomitable spirit despite the challenges presented by the ongoing pandemic. We adjusted to the new ways of staying connected to the community through creativity and innovation, raised cancer awareness, and served cancer patients and caregivers. This was possible because of our zealous board members and the support of many people who have helped enable our cause. I hope you enjoy reading this issue of *The OPTIMIST* about the events IACAN has hosted since July 2021. Please reach out to us and give us the opportunity to help you.

Monalisa Chandra, President, IACAN

Stem Cell Research, Blood Cancer, and Marrow Drive

In the second half of 2021, stem cell transplants, marrow donation, and blood cancer got special focus from IACAN. A multi-pronged intervention was done on this topic to increase awareness using radio, webinars, and community meetings to celebrate marrow donor-recipient meetings. The objective of the intervention was to increase awareness and encourage donor registration and retention. In July 2021, IACAN sponsored "The Health Factor" show and host Shrimati Meena Datt had a conversation with oncologist Dr. Sewa Legha and Rahil Jafry, a businessman and CEO on the topic of bone marrow donation as a way to beat blood cancer. Mr. Jafry is a bone marrow donor and is extremely enthusiastic about the importance of donating in general, especially if it positively impacts the recipient's health and life.

Dr. Legha walked the listeners through the causes and statistics related to liquid cancer, also known as blood cancer and how the disease is responsive to chemotherapy, marrow donation and how early treatment is crucial for those diagnosed with blood cancer. Dr. Legha traced the history of this type of cancer and the evolution of therapies and cures from the 1970s till now, including bone marrow transplants. He also informed the

STEM CELL RESEARCH AND BLOOD CANCER

Saturday, August 21, 2021, 3:00-4:00 PM



Key speaker:
Dr. Sewa Legha, D.O., Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Medicine
Department of Bone Cell
Transplantation and Cellular
Therapy
MD Anderson Cancer Center



Guest speaker:
Rahil Jafry
Founder, Executive Director
Co-Chairman of the
The Health and
Marrow of the IACAN
Advisory Board

listeners about how stem cells are found in the bone marrow and how this discovery led to the development of new technology and improved processes which benefit patients as well as donors.

Mr. Jafry shared with the audience that he had registered to be a donor and years later received a call to serve as a potential donor having been a match with a patient suffering from blood cancer. He stressed the fact that donating blood marrow was no different than donating blood, thereby indicating that one should not let the process deter one from registering to be a match and being a potential donor. Jafry mentioned that there were no aftereffects or weaknesses after the extraction procedure, and thereby encouraged anyone who might be thinking about being a donor to take the next step forward.

Blood banks often promote the “Be A Donor” program and educate people on what it entails to be a donor. Potential donor names are kept in a registry and those who are a match are contacted. The donor-recipient identities are anonymous, and Mr. Jafry mentioned that though he does not know the name of the recipient, he was aware that his stem cells would be flown from Houston to a patient-recipient residing in London. He also stressed that it is tougher to find a match for those from desi backgrounds and therefore it is imperative to build a database of donors from Indian and South Asian ancestry.

Dr. Legha also spoke about M.D. Anderson Cancer Center is at the heart of the IACAN board members, volunteers, researchers, and others who are involved in bringing cancer-related support to the Indo-American community in the greater Houston area. The interview and conversation ended with a talk about the overall success of bone marrow transplants for curing blood cancer in desi populations and the absolute need for the larger community to participate in programs such as “Be A Donor.”

In the following week, IACAN hosted a webinar, titled, *Stem Cell Research and Blood Cancer*. While Dr. Gheath Al Atrash (D.O. PhD. from the Department of Stem cell transplantation and Cellular Therapy, MD Anderson Cancer Center) discussed the process of stem cell transplant and the latest research in the area, Ms. Gaytri Kapoor from Be the Match discussed the process of registration for donation and the process of donation. Both speakers addressed the barriers associated with stem cell donation including misinformation, fear, and lack of awareness. The program was supported by Be the Match, Arya Samaj, Jain Society of Houston, Indian Muslim Association of Greater Houston (IMAGH), and Clear Lake Islamic Society. The topic is very pertinent, especially in the context of the South Asian population. Patients from the Indian subcontinent have higher chances of recovery and survival when matched with an individual from the same region.

Anjali Kanojia (IACAN)

Celebrating the gift of life – Bone Marrow Donor recipient meet

The year 2021 ended on a very happy note when the 11-year-old, Houston resident, Rushi Gandhi met his marrow donor, a California-based physician, Dr. Ketan Bakhriwala. IACAN hosted this donor-recipient meet at the India Summers and the event raised awareness of the need for marrow/stem cell donation in the South Asian community via many mainstream TV channels in Houston and in California.

<https://iacannetwork.org/tv-asia-on-iacans-bone-marrow-donor-recipient-meet/>

<https://iacannetwork.org/houston-chronicle-iacans-marrow-program/>

The past 10 years of his life were spent waiting for the match, innumerable pokes, and days of hospital stay. Due to the transplant, Rushi has now resumed a normal childhood.

For more information and bone marrow and stem cell transplant registration please visit

<https://iacannetwork.org/marrow-program/> or text CURE at 6147.

Monalisa Chandra, IACAN

Annual Musical Nite for the Survivors

Like every year, IACAN organized a musical program for the survivor group. Keeping the pandemic situation health advisory, the program was conducted virtually in September 2021. Mrs. Mani Sastry and Dr. Ravi Mukkamala presented a beautiful treat with old Bollywood melodies. The program was supported by Indian Cultural Center (ICC)

Vibhuti Shah, IACAN

Lets Defeat Breast Cancer- A webinar on breast cancer awareness

In October 2021, IACAN hosted a breast cancer education webinar. IACAN medical advisory board member Dr. Julie Rani Nangia discussed Breast cancer risk, prevention, and treatments in great detail and Dr. Raz focused on diagnosis.

In the United States, 1 in 8 or 12% of women will develop breast cancer. The risk is similar for women from other countries that have adopted a Western lifestyle. The major risk factors for breast cancer are age, sex, race, personal and familial cancer history, breast density, reproductive and menstrual history, prior chest radiation, and lifestyle. Professional risk assessment helps educate the patient about their risk, customize a screening regimen, and determine if genetic testing is needed. The risk of developing breast cancer can be reduced by 20-30% by incorporating the following lifestyle changes: 1] normal BMI, 2] Moderate exercise for 3-5 hours/week, 3] <3 alcoholic drinks/week, 4] avoiding hormone replacement therapy, and 5]

breastfeeding. In addition to lifestyle changes, chemoprevention using SERMS and aromatase inhibitors can reduce breast cancer risk by 50% or greater.

Breast cancer detection includes a physical exam, mammography, ultrasound, and MRI. Realizing a breast mass during a self-physical examination that grows over time is concerning and needs immediate medical attention. Mammography is effective in early breast cancer detection and thereby in reducing associated mortality. Annual preventive screening mammograms are recommended for asymptomatic women 40 years and older. In case of symptoms such as a lump, changes in the skin of the breast (dimples, redness), nipple changes, etc. a diagnostic mammogram and an ultrasound are performed. MRIs starting at age 25, followed by mammograms starting at age 30 are recommended for high-risk women. Women with high breast tissue density can request an ultrasound in addition to a mammogram to improve the chances of detecting any abnormal lesions in their breasts.

Stage 0 breast cancer or Ductal Carcinoma In Situ and Stages 1-3 (breast and lymph node involvement) are curable and Stage 4 or metastatic cancer is highly treatable. Breast cancer treatment involves surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, and hormone therapy; order and combinations customized to the patient. Early-stage breast cancers have cure rates of 95%. The key is early detection which makes screening mammograms vitally important. The webinar was supported by Daya, Jain Society of Houston, Clear Lake Islamic Society, Us and Inspire, Arya Samaj, and Indian Cultural Centers.

Shikha Khatri, IACAN

Yoga, Breathing and Meditation Sessions for Healing

As our ongoing program aims to improve the mental well-being of the survivors, IACAN hosted Fall 2021, 4-week Yoga session in the month of September and in Spring 2022, 4 –week session in the month of February. The Yoga program was open to the community as an intervention to alleviate stress related to the pandemic. Yoga and other comparative modalities are increasingly being administered to cancer patients and survivors to lessen many psychosocial factors such as depression, anxiety, and stress. The sessions were conducted every Sunday at 8:00 AM via an online platform by Anjali Kanojia Ph.D., a certified yoga instructor, the program champion, and IACAN's board member. Although the program was primarily designed for cancer survivors, the program assessment indicated a reduction in stress among the participants who were affected by cancer as well as those who were not affected by cancer.

This free resource has been very popular in the community and IACAN will continue providing the service twice every year.

Monalisa Chandra (IACAN)

Upcoming events

February 19th-Mind Body Healing Yoga and Meditation Program

Saturday March 26th- Survivor Annual Musical Night

Saturday, April 23rd, 2022, 10:30AM- Cervical cancer and HPV vaccination seminar by Dr. Surendranatha Shastri, MBBS, DPH (MD Anderson Cancer Center) at India House