

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 of 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

After two tough years during pandemic, the year 2022 brought renewed hope with increased vaccination and subsequent reduction in the severity of the pandemic. IACAN is now geared up with renewed energy and has resumed in-person events in the community with adequate precautions. We adjusted to the new ways of staying connected to the community through the hybrid model of outreach and service to raise cancer awareness, and serve cancer patients and caregivers. This was possible because of our zealous board members and the support of those who have helped enable our cause. I hope you enjoy reading this issue of *The OPTIMIST* about the events that IACAN has hosted over the last one year. Enjoy the summer with your family and stay safe. 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 transplant, marrow donation, and blood cancer got special focus from IACAN. Multi pronged intervention was done on this topic to increase awareness using radio, webinar and community meeting to celebrate marrow donor-recipient meet. Objective of the intervention was to increase awareness and encourage donor registration and donor 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

STEM CELL RESEARCH AND BLOOD CANCER
Saturday, August 21, 2021. 3:00-4:00 PM



Key speaker:
Dr. Al Ahmad Ghazal, D.O, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Medicine
Departments of Stem Cell
Transplantation and Cellular
Therapy
MD Anderson Cancer Center



Guest Speaker:
Dr. Sewa Legha
Recruitment
Coordinator for the
Marrow and
Member of the IACAN
Advisory Board

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 evolution of therapies and cures from the 1970s till now, including bone marrow transplant. He also informed the listeners how stem cells are found in bone marrow and how this discovery led to development of new technology and improved processes which benefits 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 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 being at the heart of the IACAN board members, volunteers, researchers, and others who are involved in bringing cancer-related support for the Indo-American community in the greater Houston area. The interview and conversation ended with the talk about overall success of bone marrow transplant 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 about the process of stem cell transplant and the latest research in the area, Ms. Gaytri Kapoor from Be the Match discussed about 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 South Asian population. Patients from Indian

subcontinent have higher chances of recovery and survival when matched with an individual from the same region.

Anjali Kanojia, PhD

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 on the need of 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/>

Past 10 years of his life was 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, PhD, IACAN

Annual Musical Night for Cancer Survivors

As in previous years, IACAN organized a musical program for cancer survivors. In compliance with the pandemic health advisory, the program was conducted virtually in September, 2021 and in-person in March, 2022. Mrs. Mani Sastry and Dr. Ravi Mukkamala presented a beautiful treat with old Bollywood melodies. The program was supported by India 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 of 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. MRI 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 ISlamin society, Us and inspire, Arya Samaj, and Indian Cultural centers.

Shikha Khatri, PhD, IACAN

Yoga, Breathing and Meditation Sessions for Healing

As part of our ongoing program aiming to improve the mental wellbeing of the survivors, IACAN hosted 2, 4-week yoga sessions in the Fall 2021 and in Spring 2022. 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 both cancer patients and survivors

to lessen many psychosocial factors such as depression, anxiety, and stress. The sessions were conducted on Sundays 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, PhD, IACAN

Cervical Cancer Screening and HPV Vaccination

The poster features two circular portraits. The top one is of Neelesh Misra, with text: "Neelesh Misra Audio Storyteller, Author, Lyricist, Founder of Slow and Gaon Connection (Presentation Via video)". The bottom one is of Dr. Surendranath Shastri, with text: "Dr. Surendranath Shastri M.B.B.S., M.D., D.PH. Professor, Department of Health, Disparities Research, MD Anderson Cancer Center". The central text reads: "PRESENTS ACT TODAY FOR A BETTER TOMORROW: BENEFITS OF CERVICAL CANCER SCREENING AND HPV VACCINATION SATURDAY, APRIL 23, 2022 10:00am to 12:00pm". Logos for IACAN and other partners are visible at the top.

IACAN and its local partners Daya, Unite and Inspire, and ICC organized an educational event on Cervical cancer and HPV vaccination on April 23 at India House, Houston. The venue was teeming with curious high schoolers, concerned parents, and guardians eager to “act today for a better tomorrow”.

“People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel” -Maya Angelou.

In keeping with that thought, IACAN collaborated with the renowned Indian storyteller Neelesh Misra who narrated a relatable, informative and empowering story about a cervical cancer survivor and concerned mother. The emotional tale and its compassionate rendition left a mark on the audience and hopefully inspired them to take action.

Dr. Surendranath S. Shastri of the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center was the key speaker who gave a riveting talk on Cervical cancer and HPV vaccination. He shared several anecdotes of how his outside-the-box thinking and unusual approaches to educating people improved cervical cancer screening and mortality rates.

Of the 150 types of human papilloma viruses (HPVs), types 16 and 18 cause ~70% of cervical cancer cases globally. In addition to cervical cancer, HPV causes vaginal, anal, penile, vulvar,

and oropharyngeal cancer. The immune systems of a majority of individuals that get infected with HPV can clear the infection. However, DNA damage to cells in individuals that harbor the virus results in precancerous lesions after a long latency of ~18 years. The Pap-test is used to screen for these precancerous cells to prevent progress to full-blown cancer.

Women 21-29 years old should screen every three years by Pap-test or every five years by HPV DNA testing. Most health care centers offer co-testing (Pap smear and HPV DNA) for a thorough screen. Women <21 and >65 years do not need screening.

Although cervical cancer screening is readily available, there is no recommended screening for other HPV-caused cancers like vaginal, anal, penile, vulvar, and oropharyngeal. HPV vaccination is a safe and effective way to protect against HPV types that cause these cancers. The currently available 9-valent vaccine is effective against nine types of HPV and can be obtained free of cost through the state health department. Boys and girls vaccinated before their 15th birthday need two doses, and those vaccinated after their 15th birthday need three doses. Immunocompromised or HIV-positive adults (22-45 years) also require three doses.

The event concluded with an engaging dialog between the audience and the speaker. Of particular note was the enthusiastic participation from the high-schoolers who gained valuable information that they could use and share with friends.

Shikha Khatri, PhD, IACAN

International Day of Yoga 2022: Celebrating Cancer Survivorship Through Yoga.

On June 5th 2022, IACAN with support from the SVYASA-Houston (Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana) celebrated the International Day of Yoga 2022 at the Sugarland Memorial Park. In recognition of the National Cancer Survivor's day which is a celebration of those who have survived and an inspiration for those recently diagnosed, the IACAN IDY 2022 was focused on celebrating cancer survivorship through yoga.

On this pleasant Saturday morning, participants gathered in the open pavilion with their yoga mats and enjoyed a therapeutic session of mind and body healing yoga led by Jayachandran Chandrashekar, ME, YICC, C-IAYT, a trained and experienced yoga therapist from Svyasa. The mix of survivors and caregivers felt rejuvenated after an hour-long session followed by a healthy vegetarian brunch from Panera Bread. A combination of the pleasant outdoors (protected from harsh heat of the sun under the roof of the pavilion), immersive experience of the various

stages of controlled breathing and simple stretching, transgressing through each part of our being, was an invigorating journey.

Feeling refreshed after the session, we had the opportunity to interact with Jayachandran as he shared his journey with yoga detailing the physiological and psychological benefits reaped by him which helped him overcome his longstanding physical problems and inspired him to train to be a professional therapist. Some of the survivors also shared their personal stories and the impact yoga has had on their physical and mental wellbeing. As the celebration wrapped up, we bid farewell in anticipation of meeting again later in the fall for the bi-annual Mind Body healing yoga program hosted by IACAN.

Ronald Abraham, IACAN

Upcoming Events

Various IACAN programs provide essential services to *the Indian American community*, the need for which has only grown post-pandemic. Generating funds is vital to sustaining the services we provide, but due to the COVID pandemic, we haven't been able to host a fundraiser to replenish our resources since 2019.

IACAN is hosting a **fundraising gala on Saturday, September 10th, 2022**, and cordially invites you to grace us with your presence and reconnect with the IACAN family members over dinner, cocktails, and fun-filled entertainment.

We request you to kindly RSVP no later than August 18th, 2022, by registering through the website www.iacannetwork.org, email iacannetwork@gmail.com, or phone 713-370-3489. IACAN is grateful to all the donors, patrons, and volunteers for supporting the noble cause and keeping IACAN impactful through these challenging times.

Information on all programs is available on the [IACAN website](#) and reminders will be posted on our [Facebook](#) page.