

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

As in the past years, 2024 took off for IACAN with an enthusiastic marrow drive partnering with NMDP on January 1st. In the following weeks and months, we continued augmenting the marrow registry with hundreds of new donors through multiple marrow drives at social and cultural events; encouraged the practice of yoga through the Spring Mind Body Healing Yoga program with SVYASA; celebrated our Survivors and caregivers at our annual Music program and again at the IDY event; received another round of the South Asian Cancer Health Research Scholarship applications under the IACAN Youth program, and other innovative activities. This year we have made a conscious effort to expand our reach with regards to the services offered as well as the community served by partnering with like-minded Nonprofit organizations in soliciting funding from the state of Texas. Beginning with this edition of the Optimist, we are proud to introduce the "Editor's Choice" column, where the editor curates critical health-related content essential for our readers' awareness. I hope you will enjoy reading about IACAN's activities and learn of the upcoming events in the year ahead. IACAN is committed to its service to our community and we look forward to your sustainable support and cooperation. IACAN is here as a partner and resource for you, so please reach out and allow us to serve you.



Ronald Abraham

## Feature Story - Beating Leukemia

### A Houston Man Meets His Life Saver!

A bag of magical blood stem cells from a Chicago resident gave a second chance at life to the Houston resident, Anuj Patel. Anuj, a father of two, a loving husband, and a precious son was diagnosed with leukemia in 2022. Prior to his diagnosis, he went on a cruise with his family where he realized that he had a significant loss of energy. Upon his return, he got tested and received the diagnosis of leukemia and learned that a blood stem cell transplant from a matching donor would be his best chance of a cure. The fact that matching donors and patients have a genetic component, the best match for a patient would be someone who shares his ethnic background. That means that Anuj had a better chance of finding a match from the Indian community. This information distressed him and his family because they knew that Indians were underrepresented in the NMDP (National Marrow Donor Program) registry.

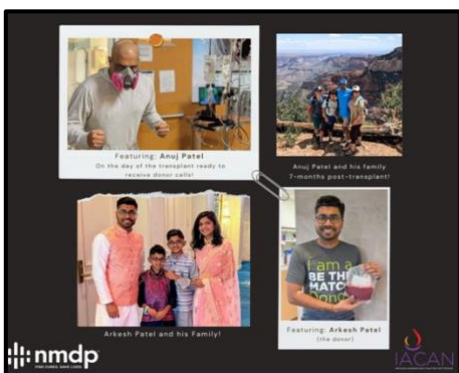
Anuj had always been very hands-on with his sons. The thought of raising the boys without him frightened his wife, Perri Patel. The possibility of finding a matching donor was minuscule, but the stars aligned. A matching donor in Chicago was found. He donated his cells, and Anuj received a gift of life! The donor did not know who would receive his cells, but he sent his prayers with his cells to this anonymous matching patient.

After a year, NMDP arranged a virtual meeting where Anuj along with his family met his donor and his family and put a name and face to his donor, Arkesh Patel. Such happiness!

Arkesh joined the NMDP registry back in 2011 at a Garbha event. NMDP along with IACAN regularly host donor registration booths at many cultural celebrations across Greater Houston. He did not know that the Garbha event was the stage for giving a life-saving gift to Anuj after 12 years.

IACAN and NMDP are continuously working on growing the registry to add more life-savers like Arkesh to provide second chances to people like Anuj. We partner with colleges, big and small corporations, and religious and community-based organizations. That Arkesh started his journey with NMDP at a Garbha event is a testament to the power of Indian community events in finding a cure for people like Anuj.

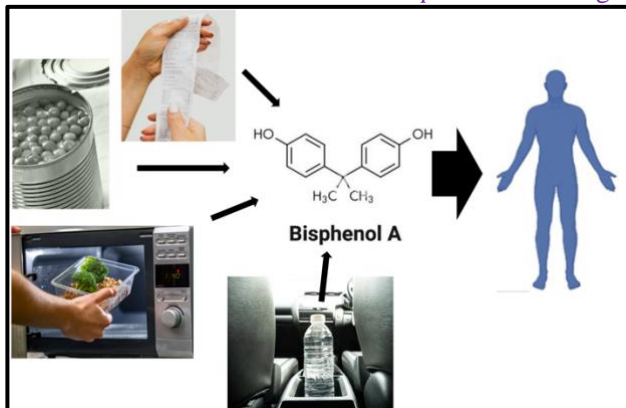
-Gaytri Kapoor, NMDP and IACAN



## Editor's Choice – The Ubiquitous Xenoestrogen Bisphenol A (BPA)

*Bisphenol A (BPA)* is a synthetic compound widely used in producing plastics and resins, commonly found in products such as water bottles, food containers, can linings, bottle tops, and thermal paper receipts. Due to its extensive use, BPA has become a pervasive environmental contaminant, leading to nearly ubiquitous human exposure.

The most common route of *BPA exposure* is through the consumption of food and beverages that have been in contact with



materials containing BPA, such as canned foods and drinks, and plastic containers. Additionally, handling thermal paper receipts and other consumer products containing BPA can result in skin absorption.

*BPA is implicated in various adverse health effects.* Its ability to mimic estrogen disrupts normal hormonal functions, leading to abnormal cell growth and potential cancerous transformations. BPA exposure is associated with developmental delays and behavioral issues, including ADHD, and can impact growth patterns in children. It also has significant effects on reproductive health, linked to irregular menstrual cycles in women and reduced sperm quality in men.

Moreover, BPA exposure is associated with an increased risk of metabolic disorders such as obesity, and insulin resistance, and has potential links to cardiovascular issues like hypertension and coronary

artery disease. It may also contribute to immune dysregulation, increasing the risk of allergies and asthma.

In terms of *cancer*, *BPA's estrogenic activity* has been shown to promote the proliferation of breast cancer cells and is linked to an increased risk of breast cancer. Studies have demonstrated that BPA can induce changes in prostate cells, leading to increased susceptibility to cancer. Ongoing research is investigating the links between BPA exposure and other cancers, such as ovarian, endometrial, and testicular cancers.

To *minimize BPA exposure*, individuals can take several precautions. Choosing BPA-free products and avoiding polycarbonate plastics identified by the recycling code "7" or the letters "PC," can significantly reduce exposure. Limiting the consumption of canned foods and opting for fresh or frozen alternatives is also advisable. Using glass, stainless steel, or BPA-free plastic containers for food and beverages can further reduce risk. Additionally, it is important to avoid microwaving polycarbonate plastic containers, as heating can cause BPA to leach into food. Handling thermal paper receipts carefully and washing hands after touching them can also help minimize exposure.

Understanding BPA's structure, functions, modes of exposure, and potential health risks, particularly related to cancer, can empower individuals to reduce their exposure and mitigate the associated risks.

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- Shikha Khatri, IACAN

## Team IACAN at the 27th Annual Sprint for Life 5K Run/Walk, Houston



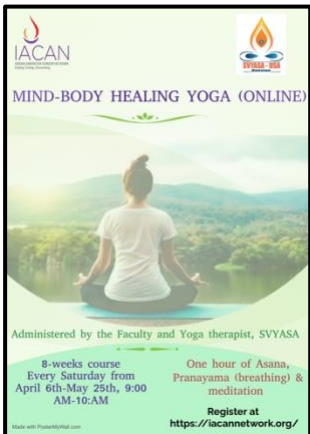
This year Team IACAN added Sprint 5K to the list of programs it supports as an expression of the organization's commitment to its survivor community by walking in solidarity with those fighting cancer and those supporting the fighters. The 27th Annual Sprint for Life 5K Run/Walk was held on Saturday, May 4th, 2024 in the Texas Medical Center area.

Founded in 1998, Sprint for Life has two missions: to raise awareness and research funds for ovarian cancer. Hosted by the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, Sprint for Life raises funds that allow researchers to develop new clinical trials, understand the biology of ovarian cancer, and develop new therapies for the disease.



-Ronald Abraham, IACAN

## Spring 2024 Mind Body Healing Yoga Program



Yoga practice has been proven to improve the mental and physical well-being of the participants. IACAN has continued to administer its mind and body healing yoga program in partnership with the Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana (“SVYASA”). SVYASA provided the certified Yoga therapist who conducted the 8-week Spring 2024 yoga program from early April through May 2024, customizing the practice to align with the special needs of the enthusiastic participants, our survivors, and their caregivers. 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. Having the sessions virtually every Saturday morning for the 8 weeks was appreciated by the participants and was welcomed as a great way to start the weekend on an uplifting note. This free resource has been very popular in the community, and IACAN is committed with SVYASA to continue providing this biannual program again this coming fall.

-Ronald Abraham, IACAN

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



This year IACAN celebrated the International Day of Yoga with support from the Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana (“SVYASA”) on June 2 which is also the National Cancer Survivor’s Day. The venue was the T. E. Harman Center in Sugar Land and the practice was led by the certified yoga therapist, Satya Pappu, M.Sc, C-IAYT. Satyaji not only ensured that proper techniques were being adopted by the participants but was also very detailed in explaining the science supporting the yoga practice. She ensured that each of us reached our full potential during the session and felt enthused to incorporate some semblance of these simple beneficial activities into our daily routine. The encouragement from the Consulate General of India and the support from other community

organizations not only added new flavors to the practice of yoga but also extended the IDY celebration throughout the month of June. It felt very special to be able to celebrate our survivors and their caregivers while practicing yoga on #NationalCancerSurvivorsDay

-Ronald Abraham, IACAN



## South Asian Cancer Health Research Scholarship



**Apply Today**

**SOUTH ASIAN CANCER HEALTH RESEARCH SCHOLARSHIP**

**SUMMER 2024**

**ABOUT THE SCHOLARSHIP**

This program aims to support young scholars in contributing to South Asian health literature through innovative research ideas. The program will provide a one-time, merit-based fund to support a research project to be completed by July 2025

**APPLICATION DEADLINE**

Step 1: **May 15<sup>th</sup> 2024**

Final Submission: **May 31<sup>st</sup> 2024**

**FOR MORE DETAILS**

• Email: [scholarship@iacannetwork.org](mailto:scholarship@iacannetwork.org)

• Visit: <https://iacannetwork.org/scholarship/>

**ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA**

- Graduate or undergraduate students enrolled in a Texas-based University.
- Resident of the United States (US citizen, permanent resident, or U.S. resident for the last 6 months)

The South Asian Cancer Health Research Scholarship program was initiated as part of the “IACAN YOUTH PROGRAM” with the objective of supporting young scholars in contributing to South Asian health literature through innovative research ideas in the areas of clinical, behavioral science, population science, or global health. A major aim of this program is to afford the South Asian youth community research experience while increasing awareness of IACAN in the community. In this cycle, one application was received and is currently under review for scientific merit by a committee of highly experienced scientists from around the country.

- Jagannadha Sastry, IACAN



## Educational Outreach – Fatty Liver Disease



IACAN’s educational seminar on Fatty Liver Disease was held on June 30, 2024, at the Arya Samaj of Greater Houston. The audience was profoundly enlightened by the expertise of Dr. Sudha Kodali, her dedicated nurse practitioner from Methodist, and the inspiring testimony of a successfully treated liver transplant patient. Their combined insights and experiences provided invaluable knowledge and heartfelt inspiration to all in attendance.

Fatty liver, or hepatic steatosis, occurs when excess fat builds up in hepatocytes (liver cells). It's often asymptomatic but can lead to more serious liver conditions. Fatty liver disease can either be Alcoholic

(caused by excessive alcohol consumption) or Non-Alcoholic. Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD) is a condition when fat accumulates in the liver without significant alcohol consumption. It ranges from simple steatosis to nonalcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH), which can progress to fibrosis, cirrhosis, and liver cancer. In India, the prevalence of fatty liver in the general population varies from 9 to 53% (38.6% in adults and 35.4% in children).

Risk Factors for NAFLD include-

**Obesity:** Excess body fat, especially abdominal fat, is a primary risk factor.

**Type 2 Diabetes:** Insulin resistance and high blood sugar levels contribute to fat accumulation in the liver.

**Metabolic Syndrome:** A cluster of conditions including high blood pressure, high blood sugar, excess body fat around the waist, and abnormal cholesterol levels.

**Diet and Lifestyle:** High intake of refined carbohydrates, sugars, and saturated fats. Lack of physical activity.

**Genetics and Ethnicity:** Certain genetic factors increase susceptibility. South Asians, Hispanics, and Caucasians display higher prevalence compared to African Americans.

NAFLD often has no symptoms, especially in the early stages. Additionally, NAFLD in TOFI (Thin on the Outside, Fat on the Inside) individuals presents unique challenges due to their deceptive outward appearance. Despite having a normal BMI, these individuals are at significant risk for NAFLD due to high visceral fat and associated metabolic disturbances.

Preventing and managing NAFLD, particularly among South Asians and Indians, involves a comprehensive approach that includes dietary changes, regular physical activity, weight management, and regular health monitoring. Cultural sensitivity and community-based strategies are essential to effectively address the unique challenges faced by these populations.

- Shikha Khatri, IACAN

## Educational Outreach – Nutrition and Cancer Survivorship



IACAN organized a special radio show to emphasize the Importance of Nutrition in Cancer Survivorship. This event was held in collaboration with Open Forum Houston, 103.5 Hum FM radio, and hosted by Dr. Subodh Bhuchar, Jagat Kamdar, and Dinkar on Saturday, January 13th, from 4 pm to 5 pm.

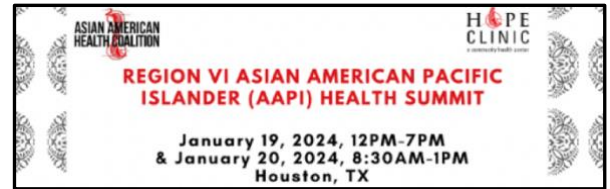
During the show, Neeta Pahwa, an IACAN board member and a registered and licensed dietitian, discussed nutrition for cancer prevention and dietary recommendations for survivors. She also covered how to manage side effects through nutrition from diagnosis to survivorship, along with lifestyle changes for cancer prevention.

To provide a firsthand perspective, Rajan Appam, a caregiver, shared her journey. She recounted the shock of her husband’s diagnosis, challenges with his diet, managing side effects, and successfully reaching his nutritional goals with the help of a registered dietitian.

– Neeta Pahwa, IACAN

## Team IACAN at the AAPI Health Summit 2024 at Houston

The 2024 Region VI Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Health Summit was held successfully, at the HOPE Health and Wellness Center, 13930 Bellaire Boulevard, Houston, on January 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> 2024. IACAN was actively involved with the planning and execution of the summit with other Non-profit organizations of the Asian American Health Coalition. The focus of the Health Summit was on AAPIs and Mental Health: Acute Problems in need of timely solutions. National and local experts weighed in on the most pressing AAPI mental health issues (domestic/ intimate partner violence, cross generational conflict, effects of COVID and anti-Asian sentiment, parenting issues, substance abuse, new immigrant issues, refugee health, the elderly) and identified potential resources and solutions to address them.



IACAN was also involved in judging the poster presentations which had many submissions of insightful research from students representing multiple institutions from in and around Houston. Dr. Monalisa Chandra, past president of IACAN along with Ronald Abraham, IACAN president assessed the posters and interviewed the presenters, as part of the judging team responsible for rating the submissions.

-Ronald Abraham, IACAN

## IACAN's Marrow Program



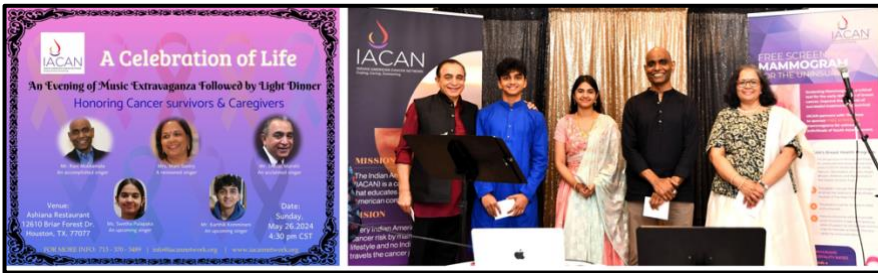
In alignment with our commitment to safeguarding lives through a robust marrow and stem cell donor registry, IACAN has taken significant strides in 2024. We have successfully organized and supported numerous drives across diverse social and religious gatherings. The table below highlights our achievements, showcasing the successful registration of 117 potential donors at community events during the first half of 2024.

- Shikha Khatri, IACAN

Date	Event/Location	Potential donors registered at the event
1 Jan 24	New Year at Sri Meenakshi Temple	70
25 Feb 24	Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Jayanti at Gujrati Samaj of Houston	12
20 Apr 24	Indian Art and Culture Fest in Pearland	8
13 Jan 24	Shri Krishna Vrundavana Temple	6
28 Jan 24	Indian Republic Day Celebration	6
27 Apr 24	Ugaadi Celebration at Durgabari	2
20 Jan 24	BKM Event at Meenakshi Temple	2
24 Feb 24	NASHA - University of Houston	11

-Gaytri Kapoor, NMDP and IACAN

## IACAN's Annual Music Concert – A Celebration of Life



IACAN hosted its annual music concert, "A Celebration of Life," on Sunday, May 26th at Ashiana Indian Restaurant Banquet Hall, honoring cancer survivors and caregivers. The audience was captivated by the enchanting old and new Bollywood melodies performed by the virtuoso Mrs. Mani Sastry, Mr. Ravi Mukkamala, Mr. Imtiaz Munshi, and the talented students of Naada Vinoda Music

Academy, Mr. Karthik Kommineni, and Ms. Swetha Pulapaka.

The therapeutic benefits of music in elevating mood and reducing stress and anxiety for cancer patients are well documented. The performers chose vibrant and meaningful songs that resonated deeply with the audience, creating an atmosphere where many danced throughout the evening. The energy and magic in the room were palpable, thanks to the performers' profound connection with the audience.

The hall was beautifully decorated, and the delightful food added to the evening's charm. Attendees enjoyed playing the raffle, with Ashiana sponsoring the first prize—dinner for two at the restaurant. Heartwarming speeches by survivors added a touching and inspirational element to the event.

The program saw a significant turnout of new survivors and caregivers, filling the hall to capacity. Overall, this IACAN event—A Celebration of Life music program—fostered a strong sense of community and served as a poignant reminder that amid a challenging journey, hope and support are always present.

-Janaki Nanjappa, IACAN

## Upcoming Events

Here is what to look forward to-

- Marrow drive and outreach at the celebration of India's 78th Independence day organized by ICC in the Stafford Center on Saturday, August 17<sup>th</sup> from 1 PM to 7 PM.
- Marrow drive and mammogram screening at the Life and Soul 12th Annual Health Fair at New Life Plaza, 3945 CR 58, Manvel, Texas on September 21, from 8 AM to 12 Noon.
- Fall 2024 Mind Body Healing Program. Details to be announced (TBA).
- In Person seminar on the role of the microbiome in cancer. Details TBA.
- Participation in the 2024 Komen Houston Race for the Cure®. Oct 5, 2024

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