

The Rise and Rise OF THE INDIAN CANCER SOCIETY REHABILITATION CENTRE

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The vision of two great men, Dr. D. J. Jussawala and Mr. Naval Tata led to the birth of the Indian Cancer Society in 1951. Their mission was two fold, to expand upon the cancer therapies available in India and to help and rehabilitate India's poor and underprivileged cancer patients swarming the corridors of Tata Memorial Hospital.

In India, it is estimated that at any given time there are 21 lakh people suffering from cancer of whom 6.4 lakh succumb to this disease every year. In the smaller cities of India, the facilities for treatment are practically non-existent and even in large cities like Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata and Delhi the hospitals equipped to offer treatment can hardly cope with the growing number of people including children suffering from this disease.

A majority of cancer patients, by the time they reach a hospital, are already in great economic and emotional distress as most of their meagre resources are exhausted from expenditure on initial treatment in their home town and travel to a specialised treatment centre. Many of them are in an advanced state of the disease. The cost of prolonged treatment, sometimes lasting over 2-3 years is prohibitive. Illiteracy, ignorance and confusion in an alien environment add to their burden. Thus, it is of vital importance that these poor and extremely sick adults and children get care and guidance immediately.

In 1962, the Social Service Research Unit of the Indian Cancer Society carried out a socio-economic survey of cancer patients coming from the rural areas of Maharashtra and the neighbouring states to Tata Memorial Hospital for treatment. The results of the survey revealed that many poor people could not even afford to avail of the free treatment offered by Tata Memorial Hospital due to the high cost of boarding and lodging in Mumbai. Hence, many of them returned to their villages without completing the full course of treatment, eventually succumbing to the disease.

This scenario exists even today.

Our Founders felt there was an urgent need to establish a comprehensive welfare and rehabilitation service for these cancer patients. Thus, an experimental workshop was started by the Indian Cancer Society in one small corridor of the Tata Memorial Hospital in 1962. The objective in starting the workshop was to alleviate the economic and mental distress of these poor patients coming to Mumbai from all parts of the country by giving them vocational training and small jobs. Through the considerable efforts of Dr. D. J. Jussawalla, Mr. Naval Tata and Dr. Usha Bhatt, this small idea of a single workshop in one small area of the hospital grew into a full-fledged Rehabilitation Centre at Parel, about a kilometre from the TMH in 1979, providing comprehensive rehabilitation & welfare services to the poor and needy suffering from cancer.

Within a short time, the ICS Rehabilitation Centre was able to provide a variety of services which included meals and nutritional supplements, prostheses to poor patients, social services including counselling, guidance and financial aid towards treatment costs and vocational and occupational training.

In 1982, a Prosthetic and Orthotic Workshop was added. The unique aspect of this workshop lies in the fact that all the prostheses and aids & appliances are produced by **cancer patients for other cancer patients** and even for those who have lost limbs due to reasons other than cancer. Different types of breast and limb prostheses, crutches, callipers, support belts and colostomy sets are made at this one of a kind workshop and are sold to patients all over the country at a very nominal cost. The same are provided free of cost to the very poor.

In addition to the Prostheses Workshop, the ICS Rehabilitation Centre houses additional workshops where patients are given vocational training to suit their individual needs. They are taught dhurrie weaving and mat making, all sorts of stitching, bag making and printing. And for those who are unable to do any work due to ongoing chemotherapy and radiation, simple assembly jobs that involve only the slightest effort such as packing, rolling and pasting are given.

In 2007, the Indian Cancer Society in collaboration with St. Jude India Child Care Centres set up 14 accommodation units for children suffering from cancer, along with their parents at the Rehabilitation Centre. Another 16 units were added in 2008. These 30 units are completely free of cost and house the children in a safe and hygienic atmosphere so vital for their recovery, where they are cared for by a dedicated group of staff and volunteers.

Today, the Rehabilitation Centre of the Indian Cancer Society is a hub of activity and provides vocational training and sustenance to about 100 poor cancer patients/survivors every day giving them the chance to eke out a living with dignity away from the footpaths outside Tata Memorial Hospital, where many of them stay. With increasing survival rates, quality of survival assumes vital significance. The Rehabilitation Centre contributes greatly to the mental and economic well being of poor cancer patients. Saving a patient's life is just not enough today. It is equally important to ensure that a poor cancer patient can subsequently lead a purposeful and productive life.

The Rehabilitation Centre of the Indian Cancer Society is indeed a **Beacon of Hope** that strives, through its various activities, to spread the **Light of Hope** into the lives of our underprivileged brethren and children afflicted with cancer.