

VISION PARADISE: TRANSFORMING TRAGEDY INTO HOPE FOR UNDER PRIVILEGED WOMEN

Experiencing cancer at a personal level or watching a near and dear one battling it and eventually succumbing to it is devastating. For Dr Animesh Chander and Sunita Roy their world stopped when they learnt in the December of 2005 that their daughter, Arpita who was working as a Resident Doctor at Chester Hospital was diagnosed with Cervical Cancer, Stage IV B. The doctors gave her only 6 months!

But Arpita didn't lose hope. She came back to India and undertook treatment at AIIMS Delhi. While undergoing treatment at AIIMS, she saw the plight of cancer patients coming to Delhi from Bihar, UP and Punjab. Despite her suffering and pain as she underwent Chemo, Radiotherapy, her concern was for the plight of these patients who had to come so far from home and she tried to guide and help the patients and their families. She realized that many cases were detected late due to lack of information and awareness of cancer as basic health care services were unavailable in the rural areas. She was concerned about privacy of women patients especially those with breast and cervical cancers and the need for deputing sensitive doctors/ medical staff for treating cancer patients and she was keen that such care should be provided nearer their homes. She had after all chosen this profession, following her father's footsteps to become a cardiologist, and devote her skills and knowledge for rural poor and her cherished dream had been to work for them after completing her training in UK.

The treatment at AIIMS was effective and when she recovered she went back to UK but the disease recurred and she passed away on November 19 2008. She was just 28!

Sunita Roy cannot forget the anguish of the family: Life seemed to have stood still for them. But instead of continuing to wallow in their grief, they decided to make Arpita's dream their vision and ameliorate the suffering of the under privileged

They first tried to ascertain the reasons and explore solutions for patients coming in advanced stages and examined the efficacy of cancer awareness programs from people's perspective. With the assistance of Paradise Dramatic Club a Society Registered under the Society Registration Act 1860 on 20th August 1976 they launched Vision Paradise at Patam village, Munger district on April, 2011. Later it was registered as a Charitable Trust in 26th July 2012.

On my enquiring why they had chosen Patam Village for their programme Sunita informed that most people have asked this question: "Why Bihar? Well, one of the main reasons is the encouragement and support of various agencies and friends such as: Media like Hindustan & Prabhat Khabar, doctors and hospitals like AIIMS, Patna, SS Hospital Patna, Mahavir Cancer Sansthan Patna, IGIMS Patna, Eastern Railway Jamalpur etc from Bihar, who believed in us and were wanted to work towards making Bihar Cancer Free State."

“Do you think, it is possible to make it cancer free?” I ask incredulously.

“Well that is our Vision and we are taking all kind of steps to fulfill it. We know, it is not easy to motivate people to come forward for early detection and treatment, but if we are able to make people realize that CANCER is Curable in most of the cases, if detected early, the battle is won.”

To formulate the Vision and assess and confirm the selection of the place they also did considerable ground work. “We met community elders, women groups and ASHA workers that reaffirmed the need of cancer awareness in the state and need of affordable diagnostic facilities in PHCs and we set our goal in producing research based studies from doctors, suggesting innovative ways to promote affordable and timely medical care in their own home state for rural poor. We also endeavored to document (report or make short documentary film) – on – delay in diagnosis and treatment of cancer patients from people’s perspectives. Since the symptoms and signs of most cancer take several years to manifest, patients come when mostly they are beyond any medical help, except palliative care and very little attention is paid in a rural set up.”

In order to assess the reasons for cancer ,Vision Paradise conducts studies as well as examines other studies which have researched on the causes for occurrences of cancer in certain specific areas for example many studies stated that the alarming rise of gall bladder/ prostate cancer was reported among people living around the Gangetic region due to pollution of the water in this region by heavy metals, like arsenic, fluoride, cadmium, lead, mercury and discharge of heavy pollutants from the industries, especially from the tanneries . Abundant use of pesticides and heavy metal like arsenic in agricultural farming could be the probable cause of increased incidences of hepatobiliary cancer in this Gangetic belt. Research studies also showed that a kind of Fungi Aspergillus, found in the river bank that produces highly carcinogenic Aflatoxin is present in potable water and in agriculture

To turn Arpita’s dream into a reality, Vision Paradise has instituted an annual award ‘Dr. Arpita Roy award for doctors working for rural poor in Bihar & Jharkhand’ for recognizing and encouraging more doctors to help rural poor. The awardees are selected by an eminent panel of International and National Jury.

Since 2012 Vision Paradise the awardees of Dr Arpita Award are .

2012-13

Dr. Ashok Kumar Singh, CEO of the Swami Vivekananda Cancer Hospital, Darbhanga, Bihar

2013-14



Dr Manisha Singh receiving the award from the Minister of Health Bihar Mr Ashwini Choubay

Dr. Manisha Singh, HOD, Medical Oncology, Mahavir Cancer Sansthan, Patna Bihar
2014-15

1. Dr. Shobna Chandra, Dental Surgeon, Muzaffarpur, Bihar, Visiting Professor in Purvanchal Institute of Dental Science, Gorakhpur
2. Dr. Vinita Trivedi HOD, Department of Radiation Oncology, Mahavir Cancer Sansthan, Patna

The 4th Dr. Arpita Roy award 2015-16 would be announced very soon and same will be posted on our website > www.visionparadise.in

Two of the Awardees Research studies viz on status of Breast and Oral Cancer in the state will be presented this year, by Vision Paradise during the award ceremony on 26 May, 2015 so as to share these with media and doctors for their suggestions and feedback.

In brief the findings from the study suggests that majority of breast cancer patients in Bihar are from rural areas, poor, illiterate, breast feeding mothers which is variant with the general conception that women from urban areas, literate, using oral contraceptive and conceiving at an older age are more prone to breast cancer. The 4th Dr. Arpita Roy award

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Another initiative of Vision paradise in countering the menace of cancer is to engage the media in bringing about cancer awareness .In pursuance of this objective ,Vision paradise produced a short media scan report – **Cancer through the eyes of media** to analyze the space and positioning of cancer news and reports in selected Hindi / English media , examining the role of media in reporting various aspects such as new findings, clinical trials and research at the next level in cancer and found that media can play an important role in bringing desired social change in society, counter popular misconception about cancer and present warning signs in all regional language. But the irony is that the almost all the programs are sponsored by PAN MASALA, while simultaneously announcing “Tobacco causes cancer”.

Vision Paradise also trains local communities to write on their local issues, and have presented need based communication strategies for rural communities in different forums. As member/Editor of Cancer Care India, an umbrella body of Cancer Support Groups . Vision Paradise has researched, produced and published two half yearly newsletter of Cancer Care India .

A perusal of their website > www.visionparadise.in indicates that the Vision has progressed from Cancer Detection and Care to include sustainable development and promotion of reproductive health of women a subject which Sunita Roy a Biologist in Reproductive Biology , and an ex Research associate of Reproductive Biology at Delhi University considers essential for improving a women’s quality of life .