

*We are grateful for the contribution of Cancer Foundation of India and CAPEd in the production of this story.*



## **FACES OF HOPE – INDIA**

### *Surviving Cervical Cancer*

Several years ago, Sangeeta Gupta, a resident of Delhi, was leading a full life. She had a flourishing career as a publisher and two young daughters, when she began to experience unexplained bouts of vaginal bleeding.

“I was a bit unnerved as that had never happened before,” she explained.

Initially, she paid little attention expecting the bleeding to pass. But after it continued for some months, she consulted a gynecologist and was diagnosed with cervical cancer. It came as a complete shock to her.

“... I wasn’t expecting something so serious...this shattered me.” she shared.

Her biggest worry was the well being of her daughters, who were quite young at the time. The prospect of mortality became a real fear.

“I would look at my daughters and I would become weak. But then I introspected, and I knew that I had to make them my strength if I had to fight the cancer,” she added.

Sangeeta’s daughters and her husband became her pillar of strength. They stood by her as she went through surgery, and simultaneous chemotherapy and radiotherapy. The treatment weakened her and she had to take time away from work.

“It can be emotionally draining and exhausting, but my family was really there by me through the process and never let me feel like a cancer patient. So that was half the battle won,” she adds.

Sangeeta says that keeping a positive approach helped her bounce back, despite the physical and emotional toll the treatment took on her. As soon as she could, she resumed her daily routines.

“Once my physical strength was back, I joined work again and would also socialize and go out with my family. I didn’t want to feel like a patient all the time,” she pointed out.

During and after her treatment she has spoken openly and honestly about her cancer with others, fighting the social stigma that is often attached to cervical cancer, particularly in the Indian context.

***311,000 women needlessly died from cervical cancer in 2018. Increasing access to cervical cancer prevention, including HPV vaccine and screen & treat, is a global health imperative.***



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“Honestly cancer doesn’t tell you which body part it will strike, so why should anyone be conscious about where it strikes you,” she added.

Sangeeta, unlike many women, survived her battle with cervical cancer and is now cancer free. Because of this experience, she now works to prevent other women from having to face the same struggle.

“My advice to every [adult] woman out there between the age of 30-65 years is to go for a screening test for cervical cancer. Don’t be embarrassed or afraid, it could be a matter of life and death.”

She says her experience taught her to be more aware of her own body. Her advice to all women is to be advocates for their own health. She educates those around her about the screening tests for cervical cancer and about the HPV vaccine.

“I found out about the HPV vaccine and immediately got my girls to take the shots as I wanted to protect them from cervical cancer and didn’t want them to be completely ignorant of the illness as I was,” she said.

Sangeeta now leads a fuller life as a grandmother, mother, wife, professional and powerful advocate.

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