

Why We Treat: The Tale of a Budding Oncologist!

Medical professionals choose their subspecialty due to a variety of reasons. Some for their passion for science, a few for the fame and financial gains and most due a deep personal belief or past experience.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Why did I join Oncology? Well, I joined “DNB Medical Oncology” thanks to my first teacher in life, as well as in Medicine, My Dad. He has been a constant pillar of strength who has always encouraged me to accept new challenges.

When I initially obtained my training position to be an oncologist, I never quite understood what would be demanded from me personally. I could neither predict the highs of directly impacting someone’s life nor the lows when a patient did poorly. I just knew that each day would be a new opportunity for me to care for patients during their most vulnerable times.

Oncology can be an extraordinarily challenging field, guiding patients on a roller coaster ride of fear, pain, and sometimes true exultation. I initially used to get depressed on seeing the patients suffer, the condition of their families, diagnosis at an early age in many patients and poverty. At one point, I even thought of leaving oncology altogether. But eventually, the realization dawned on me that getting diagnosed with cancer is not the end of life in many cases. No science is perfect, and oncology is no exception. Despite the extraordinary stress and long hours of work, I cannot now imagine a different career for myself.

Being a doctor and an oncologist was, for me, an opportunity to help others. I now know the immediate impact we have on the care and treatment of patients with cancer. Empathy is the key! We all are humans and not machines. Smoothing words, positive body language, eye contact, a pat on the shoulder; all of them work together to heal. They rekindle the hope in a patient’s heart, encourage them to not give up.

After so many years of independence, I have always wondered, why do we not have universal insurance coverage? Why do so many people have to suffer due to poverty? Thankfully, there are many insurance schemes implemented by the state and the central government. Furthermore, most insurance companies now have special policies for cancer. Unfortunately, most oral therapies, biological therapies, targeted therapies which are safer and more efficacious in many cases, are not covered by insurance companies. The insurance coverage is also not universal and in many cases, insufficient. Civil society,

patient groups, the government and oncology societies should all come together to find a solution with the insurance companies.

Our daily clinical, academic and research activities give us new hope that cancer might one day be curable. I, now, realize that cancer is a universe where one has to believe in both science and miracles. One can spend an entire life exploring it. Our field is changing constantly by the advancement of medicine and the data that drives it. Our path forward continues to be built through trials and the collaboration between clinicians and patients, finding better ways and means to treat cancer. I certainly believe in evidence, but I also believe in miracles caused by compassion, faith, love, and human values.

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