

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Breast Cancer : True Story of a Doctor from India

Dear Editor

This is a disease which does not know the difference between who is a doctor and who is not, it can affect anyone. Rich or poor even age does not make a difference. Never in my dream I had thought that I would be affected by this. I had surely read about it and I knew about it had heard of breast self-exam, attended a workshop a month ago and I neglected it thought it would never affect me as a student I had read about it but never thought it would affect me. I was careless never paid attention to it. As a result the lump which was discovered was big and my surgeons were also surprised to find such a big lump. Had I performed BSE regularly and the lump discovered earlier may be I would not have lost one breast. Had I practiced BSE it would have been discovered earlier.

The moment I felt the lump at night I knew it was Malignant, at about 1 o'clock I woke up my husband and looked at my 4 year old daughter sleeping beside me and thought who would look after her after I was gone as I thought the lump was malignant. My husband asked me to relax and said we will get it investigated.

I went to a surgeon and FNAC was also done. The first FNAC ruled out malignancy and I felt relaxed. But I had a feeling that whatever the lump it should be removed. I did not want to take a chance. Within 2 days of FNAC excision biopsy was performed, at the time of operation surgeon thought it was a malignancy and microscopic examination confirmed that it was malignant. Now they were 100% sure! I went into shock, all my previous fears about cancer came back. And before doctors could tell me I knew I had to prepare for another major surgery in which my whole breast was removed and also the axillary lymph nodes were removed, as a result I had a 6 inch long wound on my chest. I went for the chemo therapy for the first time in 2002 and radiation therapy for 6 months.

For about a year I was normal and then the cancer came back it was a major recurrence !It had spread to my whole body this time and this I came to know during my routine checkup which I had to go for every 6 months. I had to take chemotherapy for 7 months, every week for 4 hours. My husband also had to take leave besides my turning nonproductive. It is very difficult to say which cancer is going to come back and how soon it is going to come back but in my case when my first lump was removed biochemical tests had indicated that the cancer might come back but I did not expect it to be so soon. I go for 3 monthly checkups now.

The first chemotherapy was not expensive as drugs were easily available here in India the cost of radiation therapy amounted to approx.Rs 25,000. The second chemotherapy was expensive. It led to a lot of

complications and side effects every month 1.5 lakh of rupees for drugs, plus hospitalization, investigations total accounted for 15 to 18 lakh rupees of expenditure. Had the lump been smaller than 5 cm at the time of diagnosis may be treatment would have been less vigorous. I could not work for two years as I was on leave without pay.

If one makes up one's mind that BSE should be done and has will power and is determined to do it she can surely do it. Usually there is complacency. I was careless and laid back. Every body thinks it can happen to others but not to me. How I wished my lump was discovered when it was smaller. I have spent two years of my life fighting with this disease. I was complacent we think there are so many diseases but it is not necessary that they will all affect me, but one should know if one does get affected what to do about it. Before this I had read about the disease but did not know that it could affect a person in so many ways.

The whole family is affected including the colleagues. I for the first time realized the difficulties and problems faced by such a person as I had personally not known any one who suffered from cancer.

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