THE SYDENHAMITE

THE BULLETIN OF SYDENHAM COLLEGE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION FOR
PRIVATE CIRCULATION ONLY / WWW.SYDENHAM.AC.IN VOLUME NO. 06, ISSUE NO. 06, JAN 15th, 2023

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A MIGHTY BATTLE
How Society Can Alleviate the Pain of Children Fighting Cancer
~ Rajendra Aneja

Three-year-old Rohit, a delightful child, hails from Alwar, Rajasthan. Unfortunately, he was diagnosed with blood cancer. His parents, from a modest background, were lost. Rohit’s father Suraj, is a carpenter. His mother, Alka is a homemaker. They made their way to JK Lon Hospital, Jaipur, where Rohit could get treated. They had no place to stay. They would have to spend the nights in the hospital corridors or the streets. Then, somebody told them about a Kavita Cancer Care Centre, managed by St. Jude, in Jaipur. It provided accommodation, food and daytime activities for children suffering from cancer, without any charge. They were pleasantly surprised with the warm reception, the pleasing bedroom, the hygienic kitchen and the drawing materials.

A cheerful boy, Rohit settled down at the centre. He made friends with the other children and the staff, undergoing treatment for cancer. Now, Rohit has improved and returned home.

Warm Reception

Three-year-old Shabnam hails from West Champaran, Bihar. She was diagnosed with cancer (retinoblastoma). Her father is an electrician and her mother is a homemaker. They had little money. Somehow, they reached AIIMS in Delhi. However, they had no place to stay. The parents of other children at the hospital, told them about St. Jude Centre. Shabnam could now be treated humanely.

All the St. Jude centres, offer the families an individual unit to stay during the treatment. Basic provisions like flour, rice, lentils, sugar, salt, oil, soaps, etc., are provided free every week. Each family has a cooking stove in the kitchen. Every centre has common community, learning, kitchen, dining and recreation areas.

Lighting More Candles

The St Jude facility in Jaipur was established in 2014, as the Kavita Cancer Care Centre. The Kanodia family donated the building, furniture, and office equipment. A beautiful playground and garden, with fruit and flower trees, create a healing environment for the children. The Centre houses 40 children. The pleasant complex is in the memory of their daughter Kavita, who passed away due to cancer at the age of 22.

St. Jude’s fifth centre in Delhi, is in Maharani Bagh. The space was provided by Dr. Satinder Sabherwal, a qualified ophthalmologist. He owns the Shree Jeewan Hospital. He dedicated a wing of the hospital in memory of his son, Dr. Virendra Sabherwal who passed away during the pandemic. He visited the St. Jude centres in Noida and observed the overwhelming relief to cancer-suffering children. He established a centre on his hospital premises.
St. Judes in Delhi provides holistic care to 51 children. Children undergoing treatment at AIIMS, Delhi stay at the centres. The first four centres were launched in 2013, in Noida. These centres care for 42 children and their families.

**Lifelong care**

St. Judes’ credo is, “Once a St. Judes child, always a St. Judes child”. To honour this commitment, “St. Judes For Life” was launched in 2020. The children, who stay at the St. Judes Centres, during their cancer treatment, are encouraged to fulfil their potential after surviving.

The St. Judes for Life programme, guides the alumni (Judians) to complete their education, maintain good health and lead productive lives. These children, from underprivileged families, have recovered from cancer and lead normal lives. Currently, the programme has about 1,400 Judians.

From the time a child afflicted with cancer, enrolls with St. Judes, till he recovers and becomes independent and self-sufficient, he receives guidance and support, through experienced professionals.

**Serving afflicted**

St. Judes has now completed 17 years of providing hope and shelter to children battling cancer. When it started, eight children and their families lived at the first Centre in Parel, Mumbai. Now, St. Judes has 39 Centres in nine cities, Mumbai, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Chennai, Vellore, Guwahati, Delhi and Varanasi. More than 492 children live under its care.

During these 17 years, 5,979 children battling cancer have found refuge and solace in St Judes rooms. They have had 11,42,135 nights of peaceful sleep, as they fought cancer.

Well-meaning citizens like the founders of St. Jude, Mrs. and Mr. Nihal Kaviratne, have given of their time, energy, resources and goodwill to helping children afflicted with cancer. They are like candles, who light more candles around them.

Rich Indians can light many such candles in the country and change lives. Dag Hammarskjold, a former Secretary-General of the United Nations, once said, “In our era, the road to holiness, necessarily passes, through the world of action.” Helping cancer afflicted children across India, through the efforts of ordinary citizens, is holiness too.