

DR RAGHU RAM'S IMPACT ON CANCER CARE



INNOVATIONS IN DIAGNOSTICS:

- **Breast Centre Concept:** Established as a dedicated hub for breast health, the Centre reassures those without cancer and provides specialised care for those who do. This multidisciplinary approach has transformed breast health awareness and care in India.
- **Early Detection:** In 2007, KIMS introduced South India's first full-field digital mammography system—an advanced tool priced at Rs 2 crores, which was a game-changer for early detection, especially in younger women with dense breasts. In 2022, the Centre upgraded to a state-of-the-art 3D Mammography system, further enhancing diagnostic accuracy.
- **Breast Radiology Training:** To ensure that technology is matched by expertise, KIMS hosted Professor Laszlo Tabar's renowned breast radiology courses in Hyderabad from 2010 to 2012. These heavily subsidised courses elevated breast radiology standards in India, leading to the formation of the Breast Imaging Society of India (BISI) and inspiring many to specialise in this field.

Innovations in Treatment:

Oncoplastic Breast Surgery: Since 2007, oncoplastic breast-conserving surgery has gained prominence, blending cancer removal with cosmetic outcomes. The Centre has been at the forefront of popularising this approach, supported by patient testimonials and media coverage. The chapter on Oncoplastic Breast Surgery in the 32nd edition of *Recent Advances in Surgery* has further cemented its importance and acceptance across India.

These innovations have not only advanced diagnostic and treatment techniques but also set new standards for breast health care in India.

The Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation has been a beacon of hope for many. Can you elaborate on some of the most impactful community outreach programs initiated by the foundation that have disrupted breast cancer advocacy and screening in the country?

Disruptive Initiatives in Breast Cancer Advocacy

Pink Ribbon Campaign

Launched in 2007, this large-scale awareness drive across Telangana and Andhra Pradesh has been a game-changer, emphasising the importance of early detection through various unique and innovative initiatives.

Pink Ribbon Walk

Starting in 2008, this 2 km walk, held on the first Sunday of October, kicks off International Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Participants include breast cancer survivors, their families, and people from all walks of life. This event has grown from a few hundred participants to several thousand, setting a benchmark for awareness activities.

Breast cancer awareness in India owes a great deal to the relentless efforts of Dr Raghu Ram Pillarisetti OBE. As the visionary Founder and Director of the KIMS-Ushalakshmi Center for Breast Diseases at KIMS Hospitals, he has revolutionised the conversation around breast health.

Harnessing his surgical expertise and fervent advocacy, Raghu Ram established the Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation in honour of his mother. He has spearheaded groundbreaking initiatives such as the "Pink Ribbon Campaign" and developed the "ABCs of Breast Health" mobile app. With a compelling voice, he passionately discusses breast cancer, emphasising the importance of early detection, advancements in treatment, and the journey towards a cure, inspiring hope and empowerment in many.

How have the innovations integrated into the diagnostic and treatment processes at the KIMS-USHALAKSHMI Centre for Breast Diseases improved patient outcomes?

Since its inception in 2007, the KIMS-USHALAKSHMI Centre for Breast Diseases has revolutionised breast health in India. As the first comprehensive, purpose-built Breast Health Centre in the Indian subcontinent, it has made significant strides in improving patient outcomes through innovative diagnostic and treatment processes.

Paint the City Pink

Since 2010, historic monuments and prominent buildings in Hyderabad, including Charminar and the Legislative Assembly, have been painted pink every October. This visually striking campaign reinforces the importance of early detection and has inspired similar initiatives across the region.

Pink Ribbon Evening

From 2008 to 2020, this annual event featured celebrities and breast cancer survivors, drawing significant community attention to the cause of early detection.

World's First Mobile App on Breast Health

Launched in 2017, the "ABCs of Breast Health" app provides comprehensive information on breast cancer in 12 languages, making it accessible to millions. This pioneering app, endorsed by Amitabh Bachchan, supports Digital India's vision.

Pink Connexion

Since August 2014, this quarterly newsletter has been spreading messages of hope, courage, and survival, featuring inspiring stories, breast health articles, and updates on the foundation's activities.

Revolutionising Breast Cancer Screening

Partnering with the governments of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, the foundation implemented South Asia's largest CBE-based breast cancer screening program. From 2012 to 2016, 3,750 trained healthcare workers screened 200,000 underprivileged women across 4,000 villages. Detected breast cancers were treated free of charge under the Aarogyasri scheme. This initiative has gained national recognition and is being rolled out nationwide, thanks to a high-powered steering committee and technical advisory group set up by the Government of India's Union Ministry of Health.

These impactful programs and initiatives by the Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation have not only raised awareness but have also created sustainable solutions for early detection and treatment, transforming breast cancer advocacy and screening in India.

Does our lifestyle have a significant impact on the risk of developing breast cancer?

Indeed, Breast cancer, like other cancers is also a lifestyle disease. Altering lifestyle can significantly reduce the risk.

- Stop/limit alcohol
- Stop smoking
- Maintain a healthy weight (avoid obesity) and exercise daily for at least 30 minutes
- Breastfeeding is protective (the longer, the better)
- Limiting Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) to only short duration

How does genetic predisposition play a role in the likelihood of developing breast cancer, and what preventive measures can be taken?

It's crucial to resist the emotional urge to get genetic testing "just in case," as hasty decisions can have long-lasting effects on individuals and their families. Only about 5-10% of breast cancers are linked to

faulty genes (BRCA1 & BRCA2), and not everyone with these genes will develop breast cancer. Testing should only be considered after thorough genetic counselling for those with a significant family history (high-risk group).

High-Risk Group Includes:

- Close relatives with breast cancer before age 40
- Two or more close relatives with breast cancer at any age
- Relatives with both breast and ovarian cancer
- Relatives with bilateral breast cancer
- Male relatives with breast cancer
- Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry

Genetic testing is a simple blood test. A positive result indicates a high lifetime risk of breast (50-85%) and ovarian cancer (15-45%).

Preventive Measures:

While cancer can't be completely prevented, these measures can reduce risk:

Surgical Options:

Bilateral Mastectomy and Salpingo-Oophorectomy: Removing both breasts, ovaries, and fallopian tubes before menopause reduces risk. Immediate breast reconstruction should be available if surgery is chosen.

Non-Surgical Options:

- **Tamoxifen:** A drug used for hormone receptor-positive breast cancer taken for five years.
- **Close Monitoring:** Regular MRI and mammograms alternating every six months from age 25 or 10 years before the youngest family member's diagnosis. This helps detect cancer early but doesn't prevent it.

Regardless of risk, a healthy diet and regular exercise can minimise the chance of developing breast cancer. Early detection through breast awareness is key to fighting breast cancer effectively.

Proponents of alternative medicine often argue that cancer cannot be completely cured with modern medicine. From your extensive experience, is cancer completely curable?

Cure means that there are no traces of cancer after treatment and it also means that the cancer will never come back. One can effectively treat cancer. But, one can't be absolutely sure that cancer will not manifest again. That is because some cancer cells may remain dormant in the body for several years after treatment. These cells may become active and cause the cancer to come back in future. Most cancers recur (reappear) within the first 10 years. Having said that, although uncommon, cancers can relapse anytime later too.

Is it possible to completely cure cancer?

Some cancers can be detected very early by way of screening (ie before the patient or the doctor can feel cancer). For example, a screen-detected impalpable breast cancer (detected by way of a screening mammogram) can be so effectively treated that we expect the patient to succumb to other illnesses or old age, and not cancer.