PINK CONNEXION

UBF
Volume 8 Issue 1 Aug - Oct '21

Dr Manimala Rao
Early detection saves lives

The Stork Crusaders
Dr Burman and her Hargila Army

Goonj
Reaching out to the needy

BEHIND The Scenes

A healthy lifestyle lays the foundation for our well-being. There is evidence now to prove this and it is something we have realised during the recent pandemic. If exercise or physical activity is one aspect, eating right is another essential. A healthy diet helps to stave off evils like obesity, diabetes and cancers.

By diet, I don't mean starvation regimes that people follow in an effort to look slim and beautiful but about eating right. Eating right includes a balance of eating different grains, vegetables and meats ideally sourced from farmers who grow them organically. Few of us realise a lot of the food we eat, the greens and carrots come laden with pesticides and chemicals that cause cancers. I was shocked when I heard my greens like the palak are grown on sewage sites!

Eating right also includes not eating junk food. After all, the addiction to jumbo-size burgers, crispy fried chicken and Diet Cokes in super big glasses, has caused obesity and its accompanying diseases among Americans.

I am just reading a report by researchers at Cornell Medicine, USA, who have found a link between sugar and cancers. The obesity epidemic in the Western world in the '70s had prompted director of Meyer Cancer Center to warn people about consuming sugars (to stop for two days at least), as they are worse than the opoid or nicotine addiction. It is an addiction that leads to obesity and diabetes.

Sugars feed cancers too, he says. One way of treating cancer, apart from chemo and radiation, is to tweak the cancer patient's diet, says the report. A healthy diet and the occasional fasting, as Indians traditionally used to do, can make a significant difference to a person's health.

Here's to everyone's good health!

Ratna Rao Shekar

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Goonj

Echoing the importance of human dignity

Charity chips away at the dignity of the receiver. Therefore, Anshu Gupta launched Goonj, an initiative, which gives away items of use such as clothes to villagers not for free but in exchange for developmental work they do in their villages or in disaster areas. Today, this NGO operates in more than 3,600 villages, and every year, more than 4,000 tons of unused urban material sourced by them makes their way to villages.

Nivedita Choudhuri talks to Goonj founder and Ramon Magsaysay awardee, Anshu Gupta about his novel method of bringing change in people's lives

Photos courtesy **Goonj**

Anshu Gupta found his true path one bitterly cold December night in Delhi. As a rookie reporter in the early 1990s, he wanted to write on obscure people who work quietly behind the scenes. In the course of his work, he met Habib bhai, an impoverished pavement dweller who performed the thankless task of handing over unclaimed dead bodies to the police in return for a measly payment of Rs. 20 per body. The dreary winter months kept him busy as more homeless people died in the intense Delhi cold. Gupta noticed to his dismay that the deceased barely had enough clothes to cover themselves.

His anguish deepened when he heard Habib's little daughter say that when she felt cold, she would "hug a dead body to sleep because it does not move and so it does not trouble me". These words left an impact on the young man's mind about the poor not having enough clothes to wear to keep away the cold.

A trip to Uttarkashi in 1991 to do relief work in the aftermath of an earthquake confirmed Gupta's belief that clothing as a basic human right was often overlooked. An old man looked right through the consignments of food and water and begged instead for clothes to cover him.

"We talk about the three basic needs of mankind—food, clothing and shelter. The clothing part, though, is mostly ignored. Only when disasters such as earthquakes strike do we think that people need clothes. But, so many people die in winters because of lack of clothing and these are all preventable deaths," Gupta says.

This fact was to become the foundation of Goonj (www.goonj.org), the non-profit organisation that the social entrepreneur launched with wife Meenakshi in 1999. Meenakshi had to "juggle two babies as daughter Urvi and Goonj were born around the same time". "I am a Kashmiri Pandit who grew up in Delhi. I met Anshu at the Indian Institute of Mass Communication in New Delhi where we studied advertising and public relations. Initially, I was at the back-end of the operations of the NGO since I was working for the BBC till 2005. Now, I look after communications and strategy," she adds.

Gupta perhaps inherited his zeal from his father, an upright man, who was with the Indian Army's Military Engineer Services. "I spent my childhood in the nondescript towns of Uttarakhand such as Chakrata and Banbasa. Life had its ups and downs but a close brush with death when I was a class XII student in 1987 changed me. I was involved in a road accident that left me bedridden for a year. I could not get the healthcare I wanted because my father refused to pay a bribe. We were told that I may not walk again," recalls Gupta.

"The incident made me compassionate towards others," he adds. Even today, he feels pain when he stands for prolonged periods of time. But that has not deterred Gupta from walking several kilometres a day to villages in far-flung areas to implement the programmes of Goonj.

The main initiative of Goonj was the Cloth for Work (CFW) programme, which has now been rechristened as Dignity for Work. Rather than collect money to help people, they started to source and transfer unused material, mainly clothes and household items, lying idle in urban homes to out-of-the-way villages in India.

I believe that charity slashes dignity. I didn't want to give clothes to people as an act of charity. This led to the concept of Cloth for Work

"I believe that charity slashes dignity. I didn't want to give clothes to people as an act of charity. This led to the concept of Cloth for Work. The premise is clear-cut and uncomplicated. A team from Goonj goes to a village and identifies what developmental work needs to be done after consulting the villagers. It could be building a school or a road. The villagers implement the task and the role of Goonj is to ensure that the people are compensated for their efforts in kind," says Gupta.

Voluntary labour and the barter economy have always thrived in India. "We tried to revive it by ensuring the villagers who complete their work are remunerated with items of daily use such as clothes. The twin goals of development at the grassroots level and rewarding communities for their labour, thus allowing them to preserve their dignity, are achieved," he points out.

The founders of Goonj have come a long way from the 67 garments they started with. Their operations are spread across 25 states at the moment, covering more than 3,600 villages. Every year, more than 4,000 tons of urban material make their way to the villages through Goonj's initiatives. Many items are cast-offs that are restored and made reusable at the NGO's sorting and cleaning facility. Contributors can courier their material to the Goonj office nearest to them or leave them in volunteer-run drop-in centres in their cities.

People in remote villages are compensated with clothes for the work they do building a road or a school

Relief distribution in villages

At the NGO's sorting facility

Anshu and Meenakshi Gupta

Annually, the NGO intervenes in 4,000 plus developmental works across the country. "With this blueprint, villagers have built a bridge across a river in Madhepura, Bihar. Earlier, in the absence of a bridge, children had to swim across the river to reach their school on the other side. Women from Kochuberia village near Kolkata don't have to walk miles to fetch water any more as the pond in their village has been cleaned. We also helped during disasters such as the Gujarat earthquake in 2001, cyclone Fani in Odisha in 2019 and cyclone Amphan in West Bengal in 2020," Gupta says.

Talk on disasters is incomplete without putting in a word on the mother of them all: COVID-19. Gupta, who contracted and beat the virus last year, has initiated many relief programmes in the wake of the pandemic such as supporting frontline workers with medicines and other essentials, focussing on the needs of the differently-abled during this crisis and sending out ration kits to the most inaccessible areas in the country.

Talk on disasters is incomplete without putting in a word on the mother of them all: COVID-19. Gupta, who contracted and beat the virus last year, has initiated many relief programmes in the wake of the pandemic such as supporting frontline workers with medicines and other essentials

Gupta gives a modest reply when reminded of the numerous awards he has won over the years: the Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award given by Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship in 2012 and the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2015 for instance. "The communities I work with feel good and the villagers distribute sweets when I win anything. But my happiness lies in the people I interact with and it warms my heart when they keep in touch with me. My inspiration has been the villagers and common citizens of India and I admire their honesty, perseverance, simplicity and fighting spirit," he says.

Meenakshi, too, is bowled over by "the huge amount of warmth and generosity shown by the villagers I have come across and the middle-class in India who want to contribute to the world in an honest way but whose contributions are never talked about in the press".

Anshu supervising the work at the NGO

One project that is close to Gupta's heart is Not Just A Piece of Cloth. It was started after the tsunami of 2004 when the NGO's Chennai centre was flooded with old but reusable clothes during the relief phase. These clothes were recycled into sanitary pads and given to thousands of impoverished women.

Aarohi, (not her real name) a 19-year-old from UP burst into tears when she got her first MyPad. "No one has ever spoken to me on this subject. My mother used to buy old clothes from the market for all my sisters to use during menses, which meant that she had to cut down on other household expenses. Things will change now," she points out. Thanks to the changemakers at Goonj, thousands of women like her are now clothed in strength and dignity.

Dr Purnima Burman

Saving Hargila from extinction

Hargilas or the Greater Adjutant Stork were once considered bad omens, disease-carrying creature and villagers in Assam would destroy the chicks. It took one passionate conservationist, Dr Purnima Devi Barman to change all this, writes **Nivedita Choudhuri.**

She talks to this award-winning conservationist from Guwahati about how she enlisted the help of local women to conserve the hargila and completely changed the way locals see this stork.

Photos courtesy **Carla Rhodes**

A group of women huddle together, dressed in red and white gamosas. They sing traditional songs in happy voices. One woman has donned a stork headdress. Others prepare *ladoos* made out of rice powder, coconut and sugar. There is a rather scrumptious pink and green buttercream flower cake on a small table which says "Happy hatching hargila". Baby showers are special milestones for any mum-to-be and no such celebration should be without a cake. But, who is the mum-to-be here?

A quick glance around the room does not reveal any pregnant woman. The cake is now being cut as the women laugh and talk. It's a celebration rooted in tradition, but the new arrivals will not be human babies. Instead, the women are rejoicing over the imminent arrival of baby birds since it is the nesting season of the Greater Adjutant Stork in Kamrup in Assam.

Known locally as hargila, or bone swallower, the Greater Adjutant Stork *(Leptoptilos dubius)* was despised and reviled not long ago. The bird is incredibly tall—adults can reach a height of 150 cm—and has an enormous wingspan. It consumes carcasses and is frequently seen at landfills and garbage sites nibbling on shoes and dead animals. It's mostly bald-headed with a few straggly hairs on its head, and it has eerily pale eyes, large bill and a prominent neck pouch. And, it has been described by a writer as a "prodigy of ugliness".

In *The Second Jungle Book*, a sequel to *The Jungle Book* by Rudyard Kipling, a Greater Adjutant Stork, along with a crocodile and a jackal, are shown as three of the most obnoxious characters. Clearly, the stork failed to endear itself to most people.

Dr Purnima Devi Barman was, fortunately, not deterred by these unsightly birds. She gives credit to her paternal grandmother, Podumi Devi, for instilling in her a love for nature and wildlife. Dr Barman's father was with the Indian army and his frequent transfers meant he had to leave his oldest daughter behind with his mother so that her education could continue uninterrupted. She stayed with her grandmother in Pub Mazir Gaon, a village on the banks of the Brahmaputra River in Kamrup district for six years.

At first, Dr Barman—now 40 years old—was lonely and upset at the

thought of staying so far away from her parents and siblings. With no telephone or Internet connection and only occasional letters from her parents to look forward to, she was forlorn. To cheer her up, her grandmother took her to the verdant paddy fields surrounding their home and told her the names of the trees and birds that they saw. Slowly, the little girl started taking an interest in her surroundings. It was at this time that she first saw the Greater Adjutant Stork. She noticed how much the bird was detested because people felt it was a "bad omen" and a "disease-carrying, unhygienic creature".

Dr Barman's interest in nature and the environment continued as she chose to study zoology at the post-graduate level at Gauhati University with specialisation in ecology and wildlife biology. She decided to study and do research on the Greater Adjutant Storks for her PhD. She went to a nearby village to research on her feathered friends, but an incident that happened in 2007 completely changed her life.

She was walking around the village when she spotted a man cutting down a tree with some nests. Some baby hatchlings fell out of the nests and died before her eyes. The other fledglings were badly injured.

"I was stunned. I could not control myself and asked the man the reason for committing such a cruel and barbaric act. The man reacted furiously and started to abuse me.

Known locally as hargila, or bone swallower, the Greater Adjutant Stork* (Leptoptilos dubius) *was despised and reviled not long ago. It has been described by a writer as a prodigy of ugliness

He said the Greater Adjutant Stork was a bad omen. He mocked me by saying that he would employ me as a maid in his house to clean the bird poop. I tried to rescue some of the injured chicks, but passers-by came forward and teased me, asking if I eat hargila meat. To annoy me further, they started to toy with the wings of the injured birds," recalled Dr Barman.

"I went back home that day but my mind was made up. I decided to do my PhD later. For now, I would have to act fast to save these birds. Once widespread across south and southeast Asia, the storks were now endangered and their numbers had dwindled immensely," added Dr Barman. In 2007, only a few hundred of these birds were found in the Indian states of Assam and Bihar and in Cambodia. Most birds had been displaced or killed when trees were cut down.

Dr Barman decided to involve the local women in her conservation efforts. As a mother of twin daughters Sanskriti and Sampriti, who were around two years old at that time, she was determined to protect the planet for future generations. She had an ally in her husband, Dr Rathin Barman, who is also a wildlife biologist and currently Joint Director of Wildlife Trust of India.

The biologist befriended women of the villages of Dadara, Pacharia and Singimari on the outskirts of Guwahati. These villages are surrounded by nesting storks. Dr Barman believed women needed to be actively involved in the conservation process to improve both the environmental and social outcomes. Women have knowledge, ideas and experiences that differ vastly from men and their exclusion can hamper the success of certain initiatives. Dr Barman was determined to empower the local women through her initiative to save the Greater Adjutant Stork.

The Hargila Army—an all-female, grassroots volunteer conservation effort—was thus born. "At first, it was difficult to find volunteers. The women I approached avoided me saying saving hargilas was not their

The stork didi, Dr Purnima Barman

Dr Barman also visits local schools to spread awareness about their conservation efforts

priority. They had children to tend to and homes to look after. I had to think of something to attract them to the cause," said Dr Barman.

"I started to organise cookery competitions. Slowly, the women started to show up. We bonded over pithas and narus. Then we started meeting in temples. I organised folk song competitions. I spoke to the women about biodiversity and I told them we could not let the hargilas become extinct. I told them in western countries a visit from the stork signifies the birth of a baby and hence a stork cannot be a bad omen. Slowly, attitudes changed. I can proudly say that today we have 10,000 members.

Guests at local weddings now sport hargila-themed henna on their hands

Around 400 women are active members," she added.

This award-winning conservationist also started arranging baby showers for the hargilas. Now, guests at local weddings sport hargila-themed henna on their hands. Effigies of the bird adorn the entrances at marriage halls. Women of the Hargila Army also weave hargila motifs into traditional clothes such as gamosas or stoles.

In 2007, only a few hundred of these birds were found in the Indian states of Assam and Bihar and in Cambodia. Most birds had been displaced or killed when trees were cut down

"I combined my passion for the birds with the livelihood of the women. I also visit local schools to inform students about our conservation efforts," stated Dr Barman.

Pratima Rajbongshi is a member who is at the forefront of the Hargila Army. Her husband's tent business collapsed during the pandemic, but she took care of her family by selling face masks, bags and towels through the Hargila Army's contacts. Dr Barman's dream of empowering the local women seems to have been achieved.

It's been more than a decade since Dr Barman encountered the fallen storks. Locals now think twice before cutting trees where the storks are nesting. They call her when hatchlings fall out of their nests. This would have been unthinkable 15 years ago. The stork population in Assam has more than doubled from 400 a decade ago to nearly a thousand.

Dr Barman—also known as Hargila *baido* or 'stork sister' among the village women—managed to complete her PhD in 2018. Now, she divides her time between the Guwahati-based NGO Aaranyak and the Hargila Army. Along the way, she has collected a clutch of awards—the Whitley Award and the Nari Shakti Puraskar being two of them. But, she is most at home on top of her 70-feet-tall bamboo tower from where she quietly observes the behaviour of the hargilas in their nests.

BENIGN BREAST DISEASES – SERIES 1

What you need to know about 'breast cysts'

Dr P Raghu Ram explains what breast cysts are, how they occur and how you can handle them, in his quarterly column

Photos courtesy **KIMS-USHALAKSHMI Centre for Breast Diseases**

Preethi (name changed), a 40-year-old woman suddenly noticed a lump in her left breast overnight

What is a breast cyst? How does it occur and at what age is it common?

The breasts are made up of ducts (tubes that carry milk to the nipple) and lobules (milk-producing glands), which are surrounded by fatty tissue and supportive tissue. Sometimes fluid-filled sacs develop in the breast tissue – these are breast cysts. It is one of the commonest benign (non-cancerous lumps) in the breast.

It's believed that they develop naturally as the breast ages and changes. Although, one can develop breast cysts at any age, they are most common in women over 35, who haven't yet reached the menopause. They occur more frequently as women approach menopause and usually stop or are not as frequent after it. However, women who are taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT) after menopause may also develop cysts.

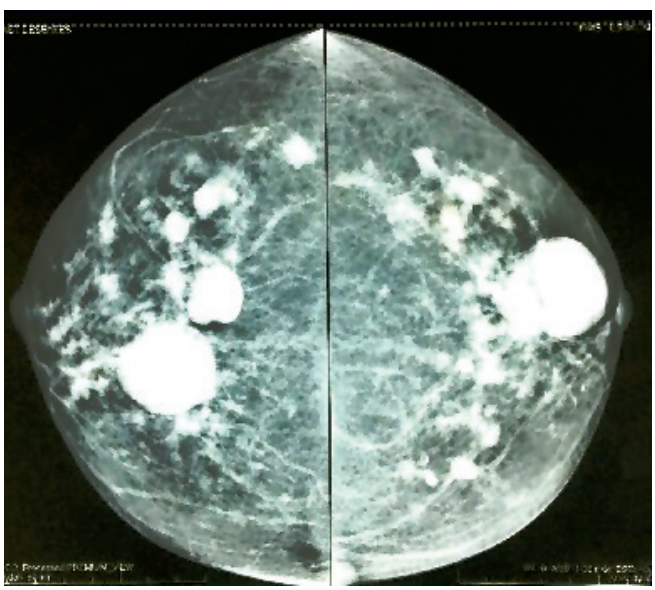
Cysts can feel soft if they're near the surface of the skin, or like a hard lump if they're deeper in the breast tissue. They can develop anywhere in the breast, but are more commonly found in the upper half. For some women cysts can feel uncomfortable and even painful, and before a period the cyst may become larger and feel sore and tender. It's quite common to develop one or more cysts – either in one breast or both breasts – and this is nothing to worry about. There are also many women who have cysts without knowing about them.

How are they found?

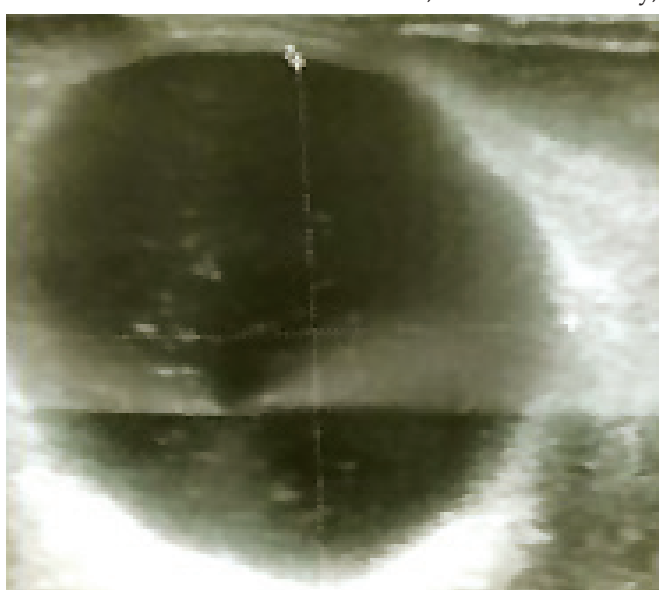
Typically, a woman would notice a lump in her breast overnight. Cysts usually become noticeable as a lump in the breast, or are sometimes found by chance when having a breast examination or routine breast screening. A specialist consultation is essential and it is important to undergo Triple Assessment, so that a definite diagnosis can be made.

Triple Assessment includes

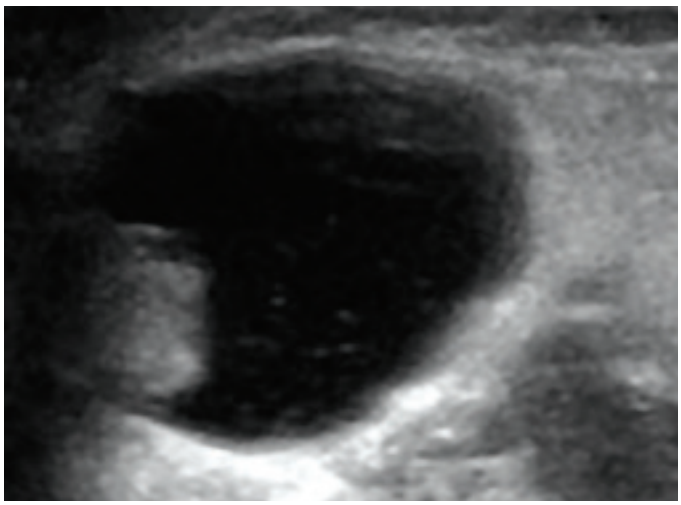
1. Clinical breast examination by a specialist
2. Bilateral mammogram (breast x-ray) and
3. Ultrasound scan of the breast, and if necessary,



Multiple cysts - Mammogram,



Cyst - Ultrasound



Intracystic breast cancer

an ultrasound guided aspiration of the cyst fluid. The fluid may be sent to the laboratory for testing particularly if it is bloodstained, as bloody fluid in the aspirate indicates a very small risk that this may be a sign of breast cancer.

Is a cyst always considered to be benign (non-malignant) and is there a risk of developing cancer?

Most cysts are benign (non-cancerous) and there is no additional risk of developing breast cancer. However, rarely, some cysts can harbour a cancer (intracystic cancer). Blood stained aspirate from the cyst must be carefully assessed to make sure there is nothing sinister.

How are breast cysts managed?

If the Triple Assessment has confirmed the presence of a simple cyst, the woman can be reassured that the lump is not a cancer and that it will not lead to a cancer. Many cysts go away by themselves and are nothing to worry about.

Majority of breast cysts need not be aspirated. If the cyst is however, large and causing discomfort, the fluid can be drained using a fine needle and syringe with ultrasound guidance. Once the fluid has been drawn out, the cyst usually disappears. The fluid drawn from the cyst can vary in appearance, from clear to very dark.

There is no role for surgery to remove cysts, the only rare exception being when there is a suspicion of intracystic cancer.

If the breast ultrasound reveals an intracystic growth, the cyst fluid must be aspirated and sent for cytology, in addition to undertaking a core needle biopsy of the intracystic growth to rule out the presence of intra-cystic cancer.

However, it must be remembered that intracystic cancers are rare and the vast majority of women with cysts need to be only reassured.

Can the cyst come back after aspiration?

Cysts can come back, or one may develop new cysts. It is important not to presume that it is a recurrent cyst. A specialist consultation is essential for assessment and confirmation. The treatment for cysts is the same each time.

Is a follow up required after diagnosis of cysts?

If the cyst has been drained, it is important for the specialist to see the patient in a few weeks to check if it has refilled. A breast ultrasound scan should be done during the follow up visit.

Can cysts be prevented?

No. ■

PINK CONNEXION completes seven positively eventful years (August 2014 – August 2021)

For well over a decade, Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation has impacted scores of lives, transforming breast cancer from a 'taboo' issue to a much commonly discussed one, thus creating the much-needed awareness regarding the most common cancer affecting women in India.

Pink Connexion is one of the many innovative initiatives of the Foundation, which has been empowering people and engaging with them, emphasising the importance of "Early Detection", all along.

All the previous issues of *Pink Connexion* (2014 – to date) can be accessed from the link below

http://www.ubf.org.in/home/Pinkconnctions/

First issue of Pink Connexion *(August 2014) features the indomitable Dr Ushalakshmi, a well-known gynecologist and breast cancer 'conqueror' who inspired the genesis of Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation*

UBF Diary

May 2021

Dr Raghu Ram 'Living Bridge' experiences in IJS

Dr P Raghu Ram was invited to write an editorial, which was published in the 'Indian Journal of Surgery', which is the voice for surgery in India. Titled "United Kingdom to India –a 'Living Bridge': Celebrating 25 Positively Eventful Years (1996-2021)", Dr Raghu Ram wrote about his own personal journey, the major turning point in his life when his mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. He also reflected upon how he has become a "living bridge" between UK and India for the past 25 years, the experiences around it and replicating the best of British practices in India so that the delivery of breast healthcare improves in the country.

Here's a link to the editorial:

https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12262-021-02806-1

Guest Lecture: Challenges of delivering breast healthcare in resource limited settings

Dr P Raghu Ram delivered a guest lecture at the centenary annual Congress of the Association of Surgeons of Great Britain & Ireland (ASGBI) held virtually from May 4-8, 2021. Over 1,000 surgeons from all over UK & Ireland participated in the four-day scientific Congress, which is the largest congregation of the surgical fraternity in the British Isles.

His talk titled "Delivery of care in resource limited setting" highlighted the innovative initiatives he has championed over the past 14 years, to ensure the quality of the delivery of breast healthcare is enhanced in India.

He was also invited to deliver the prestigious "Overseas Chairman's Lecture" at the 121st Annual Congress of the Japan Surgical Society. This was held on a virtual platform from April 8 – 10, 2021, where he spoke about the impact of breast cancer advocacy and screening, spearheaded by the UBF in rural Telangana and AP.

Incidentally, Dr Raghu Ram happens to be the only surgeon from south Asia to be invited to deliver guest lectures at the ASGBI Centenary Congress, UK and at the 121st Annual Congress of Japan Surgical Society.

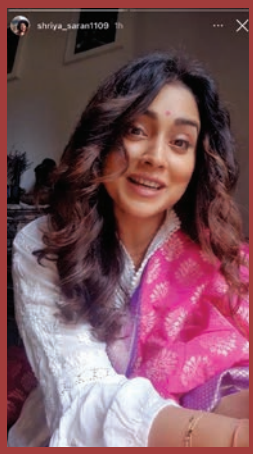
How to stay safe during the pandemic?
Well-known actor Shriya Saran interviews Dr Raghu Ram

Dr Raghu Ram was interviewed by the actor Shriya Saran on May 15, 2021 on the various myths surrounding COVID-19. Keen to dispel misinformation on the pandemic, the doctor clearly spelt out the real facts about the infection and the do's and don'ts people should follow to stay safe.

The interview has had more than 387, 000 views thus far...

To know more, click on the link given below:

https://www.instagram.com/p/CO5N34LlWGN/?hl=en



Dr Raghu Ram's tweet of gratitude and respect to NHS on its 73rd anniversary

Indian doctors and nurses in the UK, who are the largest non-British group of staff with over 30,000 healthcare professionals, are a hugely valued part of the National Health Service (NHS).

Having had the opportunity to exemplify the best of British practices in India, Dr Raghu Ram expressed profound gratitude and respect to one of the most trusted and renowned public health services in the world through a tweet that was featured on the official twitter handle of British High Commission India on the 73rd anniversary of NHS.

Yoga for the body, mind and soul

During these challenging times, fear, anxiety and stress have invaded our lives. A robust immunity and respiratory system are paramount to ensure people remain healthy and safe during this global pandemic. There is ample scientific evidence that yoga and meditation play a huge role in reducing stress, especially, in increasing lung capacity and boosting the immune system.

Dr Raghu Ram has advocated the benefits of Simha Kriya—a simple yet powerful yogic practice—to ensure physical, mental and emotional well-being, particularly during these troubled times. The doctor's message was featured on the official twitter handle of Isha Foundation on May 9, 2021.

Here are the links:

https://twitter.com/RRPillarisetti/status/1392683880088440838/video/1

https://twitter.com/Illuminati50333/status/1391326516839997440/video/1

A unique 'Pink Ribbon Mask' campaign in rural Telangana

Three-fold purpose: To stem the alarming rise in COVID infections, to save lives and to create awareness about early detection of breast cancer

To address the rapidly rising infections and deaths associated with COVID-19 in rural India, the UBF & KIMS-USHALAKSHMI Centre for Breast Diseases in Hyderabad embarked on a landmark and innovative 'COVID-19 Pink Ribbon Mask Campaign' in Telangana.

The aim of this unique initiative is to ensure protection from COVID-19 in rural Telangana, and equally, to create awareness about the importance of early detection of breast cancer through the use of pink coloured cloth masks (a colour that represents breast cancer awareness).

20,000 masks have been distributed to residents in all the ten villages in Narayanraopet Mandal – Narayanaraopet, Ibrahimpur, Banjerpalli, Kodhandaraopalli, Laxmidevipalli, Malyala, Gurralagondhi, Jakkapur, Gopulapur, Matindla.

Launching this initiative, Harish Rao, the minister of finance, Telangana, said, "I applaud Dr Raghu Ram for his relentless and significant contribution to his adopted village, Ibrahimpur over the past six years. His noble goal through this campaign is to protect women from COVID-19 and create awareness about early detection of breast cancer. This is the first-of-its-kind initiative being undertaken in our state and perhaps the country."

"The Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) Self Help Group (SHG) from Nandigama Mandal in Ranga Reddy District have made these masks that were commissioned by the Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation, which has also provided the much-needed additional income to at least 100 SHG members from SERP," he added.

Dr P Raghu Ram, Director, UBF & KIMS-USHALAKSHMI Centre for Breast Diseases, who has been championing several life-transforming initiatives in his adopted village, Ibrahimpur since 2015 said, "With COVID infections and deaths rising at an alarming rate in rural India and due to limited healthcare infrastructure in rural regions where more than 70 per cent of the population reside, I sincerely hope this unique preventive campaign will provide the much-needed protection from COVID-19 infection. Equally, I actively encourage people from rural areas of Telangana to wear a mask, which is one of the fundamental pillars of protection against COVID-19."

"The COVID pandemic has taken a huge toll on cancer treatment in the country. Breast cancer is the commonest cancer-affecting women in India. Due to COVID 19 crisis, there has been a steep fall in the number of women presenting to their doctors for initial assessment. With more than 60 per cent already presenting in advanced stages with poor survival, this percentage will increase manifold with the current unfortunate scenario in the country. We hope that in addition to saving lives, the PINK colour masks remind the women not to neglect their health and raise awareness about importance of early detection of breast cancer."

While Yella Reddy, Ibrahimpur village's sarpanch said, "There is enormous fear amongst the people in villages about COVID-19. On behalf of Ibrahimpur village residents, I am deeply grateful to Dr Raghu Ram for this yet another timely initiative in his adopted village. Prevention is better than cure, as people in villages cannot afford expensive treatment. 20,000 masks will be hand delivered today and tomorrow in every home to all the residents in 10 villages in Narayanraopet Mandal. This campaign will certainly save many lives in addition to raising awareness about the importance wearing a mask in other rural regions of Telangana as well."

Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation
Hyderabad, India

Empowering people...impacting lives

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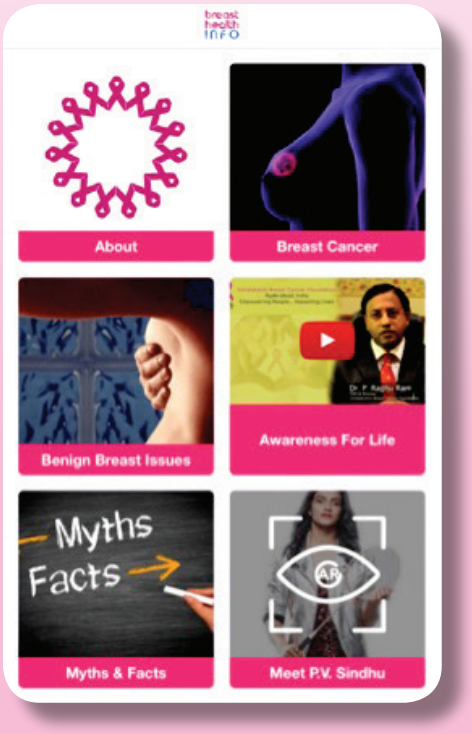

Launched by Mr Amitabh Bachchan (2017)

An initiative of the Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation

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