EXTENDING CANCER CARE IN THE HINTERLAND
It’s all about the esprit de corps

Dear Readers

In the past one and half years, the world has faced an unprecedented crisis affecting all sectors and all walks of life. The memories of lockdowns, untimely loss of near and dear ones in thousands of families, and severe stress on healthcare infrastructure as well has healthcare workforce are still fresh.

Despite this environment full of constraints, uncertainties and fear, the Tata Trusts cancer care team doubled up as cancer care facilitators as well as Covid warriors providing support to communities in many possible ways. The uphill task of construction of ten hospitals in Assam also continued uninterrupted even with meagre transitory workforce at times.

The entire project management team continued to discharge their responsibilities diligently.

As on date, we are at near completion stage of seven hospitals and the other three have progressed well.

During the pandemic, ACCF set up three Day Care Centres at Barpeta, Dibrugarh and Diph in Karbi Anglong, where the patients are regularly getting their chemotherapy, palliative care and consultations. The Radiation Unit at Dibrugarh started servicing patients in February ‘21 and is already being utilised very near to its full capacity. The Radiation Units at Barpeta and Tezpur are also ready to take patients and with completion of ancillary clinical infrastructure, the services will be available to patients very soon. Though the final goal post of operationalizing all ten hospital is still not far away, it would be wrong not to appreciate the uninterrupted efforts of the teams on ground, against all odds.

Whenever we initiate a developmental programme for the communities, there are multiple stakeholders one must work with. Myths, orthodox beliefs, fear of unknown and many other predicaments among various stakeholders also require to be addressed to reach the final objectives as development partners. All this is possible when there is a coordinated and cohesive teamwork. ACCF has set an example of being a very ‘lean and mean’ team and all the people in various roles have been leading by examples.

The ACCF Day Care Centres have been recognized by the flagship Government scheme i.e. PMJAY and the State
Governments’ Atal Amrit Abhiyan. More than 600 beneficiaries under these schemes have been attended to in the past few months. These are the early indicators of the future success of the programme towards affordability and accessibility of cancer treatment.

The journey is uphill. There is a lot to achieve and lot to give to the communities we serve. It is important to stay together and continue to strengthen the team spirit. The programmatic support from the authorities in Government of Assam has been a major and laudatory driving force. We assure our donor partners that their contributions and guidance will show the results very soon - when the cancer patients of Assam and neighbouring regions will get best in quality care and treatment closer to the comforts of their homes in the most affordable manner. There are many other interventions on the way which includes use of E-learning platforms for improving cancer specific knowledge amongst GPs and Dentists, starting special drive in tobacco cessation with state public health authorities and maximising efforts on early diagnosis.

Once again it is all about teamwork – union is strength, be it at strategic level or on ground, that is what really matters the most.

This issue of essentia is dedicated to the esprit de corps!

Happy reading...
Preparing for the D-day

While the construction of hospitals is taking rapid strides towards completion and equipment starts getting delivered, the next aspect that needs to be mapped with both is to have manpower in place that is capable to provide quality healthcare services to the patients. This objective makes it imperative for us to have a clear strategy and meticulous planning. We have adopted a four-pronged approach.

- Identify best talent from the market
- Create shadow options
- Setting the centre in order of process and working

- Fellowship programmes for Doctors and Nurses
- Creating experts through Continued Nursing Education and Medical Education
- Career path for retention

- Tie up with logical partners
- Leverage supplies by sharing
- Ensuring operations at a reduced cost

- Build consulting and other partnerships for creating temporary capabilities
- Leveraging of super specialist
- Across the globe and country interested in commitments to charity

Our recruitment process is standardized

- Planning the manpower & obtaining necessary approvals from ManCom & Board
- Sourcing candidates through direct and mass sourcing channels
- Shortlisting candidates as per the eligibility criteria set for each role
- Screening of shortlisted candidates
- Panel interview of the candidates (Panel consisting of Govt. Of Assam, Tata Trusts, ACCF and subject matter expert)
- Selected candidates to be offered appointment as per priority and location ranking
Another important aspect is onboarding, induction and orientation and we have a standard common induction of two days for all new joinees. In addition, there is structured three days of orientation for the core team members and eight days of structured orientation for the comprehensive team members.

Also, as per requirement we facilitate one to three months long preceptorship at reputed cancer hospitals such as Tata Memorial - Mumbai, Tata Medical Centre - Kolkata and B.Barooah Cancer Institute - Guwahati.

Safe and comfortable stay options are available for new employees at respective units and we are in the process of identifying hotels and guest houses. We are also identifying apartments and hostels that are available on rent through the local support team to facilitate employees coming from distant places.

We already have plans to support the units towards four key elements i.e. productive engagement, building positive work environment, taking care of the learning need for future growth and building trust in the organization. We believe in teaming up with people with right attitude and hunger to learn.

Glimpses of employee engagement activities

Induction session for new joinees

Quiz competition - Team ACCF on the occasion of Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Cultural programme organised by Team HR on the occasion of Independence Day
Glimpses from training sessions

Theme based “Do It Yourself” competition and prize distribution

Training session for ACCF nurses

Training caregivers for home care of patients

Deepanjal Konwar
Head-Human Resource
Care of the Caregiver – ACCF Initiative

Introduction

Cancer not only affects patients, but also their caregivers encompassing spouses (or partners), children, family members and close friends. Confronted with the diagnosis and uncertainty of the disease, caregivers’ emotional well-being is at stake and a notable number of them are affected by significant anxiety and depression.

It can be deeply satisfying as partners and family members can be drawn closer together. However, as the demands increase physically, emotionally, and cognitively for the patient, often less time is available to be devoted to the caregiver’s own needs, the needs of children, home care or one’s career. Thus, caregivers often feel a significant demand and burden to their own endurance and coping mechanisms, commonly reporting a plethora of their own physical and psychological symptoms. The multiplicity of these challenges emphasizes the great importance of caregivers to both patients and healthcare staff and raises the question of how to support the caregiver most efficiently.

Unmet needs of caregivers

Patient-oriented psycho-oncological researches conducted in many apex oncology centres in the world describe considerable number of ‘unmet needs’ of caregivers, defined as the “requirement for some desirable, necessary, or useful action to be taken or some resource to be provided, to attain optimal well-being. Specific caregiver-tailored instruments have also been developed to target the different domains of frequently unmet needs, like emotional and psychological, comprehensive cancer care, and information. Studies have also demonstrated that cancer caregivers have considerably more unmet needs than the patients they care for. One of the greatest risks for caregivers is becoming ill themselves. In addition to suffering from insomnia and depression, caregivers are at risk of serious illness, and are less likely to engage in preventive health measures. It is seen that many such caregivers develop a decline in their own health and are no longer able to care for their loved one, compromising the care process.

Although caring for loved ones has several benefits including personal fulfilment and satisfaction from helping to relieve another’s suffering, it is also associated with physical, psychological, and financial burdens for caregivers. Stressors associated with caregiving situations are often persistent, uncontrollable, and unpredictable, with a high burden of care. A majority end up having less time for family and friends, suffer from increased emotional stress, and neglect self-care, such as healthy sleep, exercise, and dietary habits.

Supporting caregivers

Caregivers can be supported in many ways. Encouraging to take breaks, take care of their own health, maintain a healthy diet, exercise, seek preventive health care, join a support group, and locate respite care when needed are some common ways. Advising coping strategies such as praying, talking with friends and family, and obtaining additional information from books or websites are of great help. Caregivers may also be educated on proper caregiving process and family members should be encouraged to divide duties among themselves so that the whole family participates in the care. They can also be provided with online and other resources where adequate information on adequate caregiving, respite care, and relieving extra caregiving burden are available.
We at ACCF Palliative Care Unit are developing special programme for supporting the caregivers by organizing counselling sessions at Guwahati and Dibrugarh. Family counselling sessions, self-help groups and dedicated helpline are a few interventions.

Counselling session by Dr Dipankar Dakua - Palliative Care, ACCF for caregivers

Art therapy organised at ACCF Palliative Care Unit - Guwahati

Meditation session organized by Palliative Care Team

Health session organized by Palliative Care Team

Dr Sanghamitra Bora
Lead-Palliative Care
Oncology Nurse—An Impression

Nurses see the world in its most raw, inexplicable, unfair form of reality and somehow, by the grace of their inherent hope for humanity, and unmeasurable depth of courage, still love it.

An oncology Nurse is a specialized nurse with advanced certifications and clinical experiences in oncology.

Oncology nursing care can define as meeting the various needs of oncology patients during the time of their disease - including appropriate screenings and other preventive practices, symptom management, care to retain good quality of life and supportive measures upon end of life.

**Philosophy and objectives of Oncology Nursing**

- Find affordable cancer care closer to home
- Team approach
- Focus on the whole person
- Bringing hope and healing to all
- Committed to excellence
- Constant innovation
- Ease of access
- Prevention and early detection
Objectives of nursing cancer patients

- To monitor the patients’ conditions, provide medication as required and administer chemotherapy
- Develop customised care plans for each patient
- Provide direct care, train, and guide other nurses and medical professionals

Role of a community health nurse towards community in a larger perspective & developing KAP as a cancer care nurse

The oncology nurse, along with many other expert practitioners has a vital role within the community. Due to burgeoning burden of cancer in society it will be even more crucial role in the future.

Care required by cancer patients at home goes beyond the scope of traditional community health. It requires nurses to be competent in technological skills as well as bringing in-depth expertise to the practical and human needs of people experiencing cancer.

Oncology nursing competencies

- Evidence-based practice
- Planned care in consultation with patient and family
- Team Dynamics - Multidisciplinary approach is the key
- Symptom management
- Treatment- Delivery of Chemotherapy and handling side effects
The role involves

- Ethical conduct at all times – this is often a dilemma with cancer. Oncology nurse must have a theoretical understanding of ethical principles and codes and be able to apply these principles to practice.

- Safety is paramount – cancer medication is hazardous. The nurse will practice in a culturally safe way and have a sound knowledge of radiation precautions, exposure to cytotoxic agents, coping with grief and loss, and know the signs of emotional outburst.

- Emotionally demanding – all the time. The nurse should have knowledge of support services available and how to access these services; develop listening and communication skills to provide effective support and empathy for patients and families affected by cancer; should be able to provide the right environment for patients and family to express feelings and concerns, be able to make provision for the psycho-social aspects in cancer care, and acknowledge the patient as a whole, physical, psychological, spiritual, and sexual being.

- Family needs to be engaged – The nurse should be able to use clinical and theoretical skills in patient and family education in cancer diagnosis, treatment, drugs, procedures and precautions; should have the ability to empower the patient by fostering independence and self-responsibility, be able to provide a good learning environment, and be willing to educate students and other nursing staff in care of the oncology patient.
First batch of nurses writing exams under NFP

Hands-on training of nurses under NFP

Monjula Hussain
Lead - Nursing
Leveraging Technology at All Stages

Information Technology is the critical enabler in the operation of a hospital. It can improve the efficiency and the quality of care delivered to patients. Sometimes Information technology for medical purpose could be quite expensive. Further, the process of integrating new technology is complex and has a far-reaching impact for administrators and doctors. ACCF IT Team has integrated actively itself in the medical and non-medical roles to present an innovative analytic framework to identify and analyze the key modules — HR, Procurement, Finance, Travel, Clinical Activity (Palliative) and Outreach Programmes for cancer education, patient empowerment and prevention.

ACCF IT Team had initially worked on developing an in-house app called ACCFLife, which was a game changer for all teams within the Medical and Administrative positions, as it provided a centralized, digital system. This was the information lifeline of the project during the extended periods of lockdown. The ACCFLife App encompassed various sections such as Day Care chemotherapy service, Palliative Care, Outreach Programmes and various other clinical activities where the users can capture all the screening data, vitals, and other clinical records. This is not only made for a hassle-free experience, but also paper-free for the ACCF Team and for the patients.

The ACCFLife was used as a pilot project before we could implement it to all sites. By running the app as a Pilot System for all major business functionalities, it allowed the ACCF IT Team to get an in-depth idea as to the practical requirements of different modules. However, as our business requirements grew in scale, the in-house app was small to sustain increased volume of business and transactions within the enterprise. After a long three years ACCF has now migrated to full-fledged HIS and leaving ACCFLife as a backup. This smooth migration has been possible because we have all electronic data captured in the in-house application ACCFLife, which worked as a pilot product and also a stopgap enabler while hospital information of third party is under development and delivery.
Most of the functions related to patient care journey and support elements such as virtual tumour board, tele pathology, tele radiology, patient feedback, appointment management system is all incorporated in the HIS. Patients do not have to queue up anywhere in the system. In addition, the enterprise functions like HR management, finance management procurement and inventory control, all is through a simple integrated user-friendly system.

The ACCF IT Team had overcome many challenges to develop and integrate itself in all sites, mostly remote areas. The IT Team coordinated with ISP vendors for network implementation via fiber optics, and installation of network towers where fiber optic was not possible in remote sites, and a method for continuous network monitoring. A local server was installed to act as an Ad hoc Server to collect all data from each site and then further forward it to the centralized HIS, allowing for data backup and non-stop operation during network down times.

This has been a unique journey from conceptualizing an application for hinterland cancer care in a greenfield project to migration to modern Hospital Information System. Cooperation of all line managers and key stakeholders and willingness of each of them to contribute and evolve the IT product has been the key. Teamwork has been the strength of this programme. And what happens to the original humble ACCFlife? This continues to get serviced as a backup system in case of any crisis!
Making a Difference Together with Our Partners

Dibrugarh – a level 3 facility equipped with a LINAC, and high-end radio-diagnosis equipment such as CT scan and MRI has been set up in collaboration with IndusInd Bank. While the construction is nearing completion, focus is on community interventions - including preventive healthcare packages that have been delivered at the community level at Kokrajhar, Lakhimpur and Jorhat districts with the support of IndusInd Bank.

At the Dibrugarh facility, high-end machines – LINAC, Dosimetry and a CT Simulator has been set up in collaboration with IndusInd Bank. While the construction activities are in progress and likely to complete by early next year, a number of activities have been undertaken at community level to educate masses towards cancer as a disease, preventive aspects and also addressing the primary cause of oral cancer i.e. tobacco abuse. Tobacco free education institutions (TOFEI) is a programme that has been completed in seven schools. At community level 180 screening camps were organized in coordination with district health authorities and more than 6000 women were screened for breast and cervical cancers. In addition, health check-up and screening were also undertaken at three tea gardens and about 4000 tea garden workers have been benefitted. Many training sessions have been conducted with General Practitioners, JeevikaSakhis and women from self-help groups (livelihood scheme workers) college students through NSS.

・700 people sensitized on cancer prevention and its risk factors
・500 teachers and students sensitized on cancer prevention and its risk factors
・300 general practitioners trained on cancer screening
・1500 people screened for oral, breast, cervical cancers along with diabetes and hypertension
・5000 radiation therapy fractions given
Community Outreach Programmes organised at different locations in Assam by team ACCF

At the upcoming Tezpur cancer facility of ACCF, Engineers India Limited (EIL) had supported with the brachytherapy unit. The equipment will benefit patients from Tezpur and nearby places in getting treatment without having to travel long distances.
At two geographies of Assam – Karbi Anglong and Cachar, Pfizer is supporting the Community Outreach Programme on the following four components:

- Health and Wellness Kiosks: screening of walk-in population for NCDs and disseminating awareness about healthy lifestyle
- Community Outreach: covering prevention, awareness, early detection, and palliative care
- Virtual Patient Helpdesk: provides psycho-social, financial counselling, navigation, and appointment
- Patient Referral and Tracking Platform: tracks and captures demographics and screening related information for ensuring timely treatment
While the Barpeta facility is nearing completion, the Radiation Oncology Department – supported by NRL - is fully commissioned and ready. On an average there are forty patients who would travel daily to Guwahati for radiation. Now, they can get treated here – closer to the comfort of their homes. This radiation oncology department will touch thousands of lives and treat cancer.
Snippets

The ACCF Jorhat team had participated in a Special Awareness Programme on Cancer. Dr Dulal Kiran Mondal spoke at the event. The programme was attended DC, Jorhat and other community leaders.

Josephine Demata, Nurse-in-Charge at Day Care Center, Dibrugarh has received recognition at the Tata Trusts Townhall for her pioneering work in setting up first Day Care Centre for cancer at Dibrugarh on the face of multiple challenges on ground.

Dr Venkata Pradeep Babu Koyyala, Medical Oncologist - ACCF Tezpur unit has been invited to present his paper at Geneva Titled – 'need for awareness about immune related adverse events (iRAEs) among community physicians in India’ at the world Immuno Oncology Congress scheduled on December 05, 2021.
A CME on Management of Oral Cancers - An Update was organized on October 24, 2021 at Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed College and Hospital – Barpeta. The programme was attended by Prof (Dr) BC Goswami, Director - State Cancer Institute, Guwahati; Prof (Dr) Amal Chandra Kataki, Director - B Barooah Cancer Institute, Guwahati; Prof (Dr) Ramen Talukdar, Principal & CMS – FAAMCH; Dr Sajal Sen, Chief Operating Officer - ACCF; Prof (Dr) T Kannan Medical Director - ACCF; Dr Thamizholi S, Clinical Oncologist - ACCF; Dr Satyanarayan Sharma, Medical Superintendent - ACCF; Dr Venkata Pradeep Babu Koyyala, Medical Oncologist – ACCF, Dr Kailash C Mishra - Radiation Oncologist, ACCF; Faculty, Post Graduate students and senior nurses, of the medical college.
The ACCF Radiation therapy Team at Dibrugarh, under the dynamic leadership of Dr. Phulkumari Talukdar, achieved a new milestone by completing radiation of three hundred patients.

CRM team led by Dr. Megha Khobragade, Additional Director of Health Services, Union MoHFW, appreciated the Barpeta cancer facility of ACCF during formal visit.

Bidisha Dutta – RSO; Shruti Sikha Goswami – Medical Physicist; and Ankita Bhuyan - Medical Physicist presented a poster on ‘2D Verification of Treatment Plan using MapCHECK and EPID’ at the State Cancer Institute on the occasion of International Day of Medical Physicist.

The ACCF Radiation therapy Team at Dibrugarh, under the dynamic leadership of Dr Phulkumari Talukdar, achieved a new milestone by completing radiation of three hundred patients.

Stay connected

@AssamCancerCareFoundation  @CareAssam  @CareAssam

www.linkedin.com/company/assam-cancer-care-foundation

For Cancer related query call toll free number 18003454325

Registered office :

3rd floor | V.K. Trade centre | Opposite Down town hospital | G.S. Road | Guwahati | Assam 781022 +91-90852 02020 | info@accf.in

www.assamcancercarefoundation.org