

Get set for the RUN

A cancer survivor tells her story as the city gets ready for its first Pinkathon to promote women's fitness and emphasise the importance of screening



FOR THE CAUSE OF CANCER Inder Das, Dr. Prithvi Mohandas and Milind Soman PHOTO: K. PICHUMANI

Inder Das smiles with the confidence of a woman who has won. Three years ago the 67-year-old found a lump in her breast. "My daughter was moving to the U.S. at that time so I didn't tell anyone. I knew that if she found out about it, she would worry." It took her one year to finally go to the doctor for a check up. "I had never had a mammogram in my life till then."

When she tested positive for breast cancer, she underwent surgery, after which she had chemotherapy for five months. Then came 20 minutes of radiation from Monday to Friday for a month. Terrifying? She doesn't think so. "It was fine," she shrugs, adding with a giggle, "The doctors would tell me not to talk too much because I had to conserve energy... Not that it stopped me."

In the lead up to Chennai's

first Pinkathon, a run designed for women to promote the importance of fitness and cancer screening, Dr. Prithvi Mohandas, Joint Managing Director of MIOT hospital, chats with Inder in an attempt to demonstrate that cancer is not as terrifying as it's made out to be — and emphasise how important it is for women to pay attention to their health.

"Time after time you get a hospital or doctor talking about cancer, and the importance of screening, and people have just got cynical about it. They feel like either the hospital wants business, or the doctor wants practice. There's no push to hear the patient's side of story.

But that is what is important," says Dr. Mohandas. "We should hear about people's experiences, without prejudice. It's important that ordinary people who have had the disease can tell other ordinary people about how they fought it."

This is why Inder is here. "She's proof that cancer is curable, and the process is not as unpleasant and frightening as it's made out to be. In urban India, 8 out of 100 get breast cancer. So from age 40 to 70, women have to be screened every three years. If you have a first degree relative — like a sister — then you must act on it earlier."

By the time Inder's cancer

was detected, she was at stage three. "But if she had caught it earlier, there would have been no hormone therapy. No drugs. No radiation. This is why women need to be self aware," says Dr. Mohandas, talking about how getting involved in a run like the Pinkathon is great because women should not underestimate how important it is to be fit. "The truth is, if you are a strong specimen with good immunity it's more likely your body will fight back."

As Inder proves, in the end, it's not about commercial interests and advertising. The central message is from one cancer patient to another saying "I've gone through it and I won."

(The MIOT Pinkathon will be held in Chennai on April 13. The run is exclusively for women. Register on www.pinkathon.in)

SHONALI MUTHALALY

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