



PURNA KURKURE

INDIA

Dr. Purna Kurkure is currently a Senior Advisor, Clinical Collegium for Oncology Services Narayana Health (NH) Group, Head of the Department of Pediatric Haemato-Oncology & Bone Marrow Transplant at NH-SRCC Children's Hospital at Mumbai.

She has carved a niche for herself in the field of oncology after 33 years of services at Tata Memorial Hospital, Mumbai and retired as Head of Department of Pediatric Oncology in 2015. She has contributed a great deal towards the development of pediatric oncology in the sphere of service, education, and research in India and in the Asian subcontinent, winning many accolades.

She was President of the SIOP Asia Continental Branch (2007-2010) and was the President of a successful 2007 SIOP Congress in Mumbai. She was Consultant to the sub-committee on SIOP Pediatric Oncology in Developing Countries (currently the SIOP Global Health Network). She is a member of Steering Committee of the Asian Paediatric Haematology Oncology Group (APHOG) since 2012 where she currently serves as the Executive Council Member and Treasurer. She is a Founding Member and Co-convenor of Pediatric Hematology Oncology (PHO) Chapter of Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP). She served as Treasurer, Secretary and President of the PHO Chapter (1987-1999) and contributed towards strong foundation. She also served the Central IAP as Executive Board Member (1999-2000) and Treasurer (2020-2021).

Currently, Purna is the President of the Indian Society of Neuro Oncology, Joint Secretary of the Central IAP, and a Joint Managing Trustee and in charge of the Survivorship and Rehabilitation Division of the Indian Cancer Society (ICS).

**"Passion
never fails -
Just do it."**

On Relationships that Influenced My Career

I started my career in the combined department of Medical and Paediatric Oncology in 1982 at Tata Memorial Hospital (TMH). As a trained paediatrician, I was convinced at outset that a “child is not a miniature adult.” Childhood cancers are different from adult cancers and need to be treated differently.

The hallmark of success in paediatric oncology is the multidisciplinary approach executed through carefully orchestrated combined modality team comprising of a paediatric oncologist, a paediatric surgeon, a radiation oncologist, and various diagnostic specialists. I was exposed to the multidisciplinary tumour board concept during my training at the Royal Marsden Hospital, London, in 1981 under tutelage of Dr. McElwain TJ and learnt haematopoietic stem cell transplant under Dr. Ray Powles. I was fortunate to get a visiting fellowship award by Imperial Cancer Research Funds, London, to receive training in Paediatric Oncology under Prof. J. S. Malpas at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London, and training in immunophenotyping in leukemia from the pioneer in the field, Sir Melvyn Greaves.

This comprehensive training helped me in developing Paediatric Oncology Programme at TMH. I was a team member for first Bone Marrow Transplant in India in 1983. I contributed towards development of academic programmes in TMH and in India. I was involved in developing curriculum in Paediatric Oncology for its recognition as paediatric subspecialty by Medical Council of India. I am a mentor and examiner for the board exam in Paediatric Haematology and Oncology.

Childhood cancer survivorship is a recent focus for research because of the high curability of childhood cancers. My postgraduate teacher, Dr. Meena Desai, founder of Pediatric Endocrinology in India, inspired me to explore endocrine late effects of cancer therapy in childhood cancer survivors. I got an opportunity to be a Visiting Physician at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, USA, in 1990. Drawing inspiration from the After Completion of Treatment (ACT) Clinic at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and under the mentorship of Dr. Melissa Hudson, I could start an organized survivorship care in India, by starting ACT Clinic at TMH in February 1991 and promoting a Childhood Cancer Survivors' Support Group-UGAM in June 2009 under umbrella of ICS. I initiated a survivorship module PICASSO (Partnership In CAncer SurvivorShip Optimization) in 2017 under the Cancer Survivorship and Rehabilitation Division of ICS. PICASSO is holistic survivorship and rehabilitation module being implemented in partnership with Pediatric Cancer Units (PCU). The objective is to facilitate the PCU to start hospital-based ACT Clinic where medical assessments are done by pediatric oncologist and psychosocial care is taken care of by ICS for holistic care of survivors.

On Challenges and Overcoming Them

Cancer survivorship has been my passion since the early part of my career. TMH is a busy tertiary cancer center drawing patients from across India and neighboring countries. The priority in the 1990s was to get better organized for delivering curative treatment, better supportive care, improve survival, decrease abandonment of treatment, and bring majority of childhood cancer patients in the network for treatment.

As an active member of SIOPODC, I along with my colleagues from major centers launched National Training Program in Practical Paediatric Oncology in 1998 under umbrella of PHO Chapter of IAP and supported by SIOPO to increase awareness among paediatricians about early diagnosis and prompt referral for curative goal. Treatment abandonment due to logistics of prolonged stay in metropolitan cities and due to lack of finances for treatment were addressed by starting Home Away from Home in Mumbai in 2006 and subsequently in major cities in partnership with busy PCU in collaboration with St. Jude Child Care Center. Financial difficulties were addressed through unique financial model of Cancer Cure Fund of Indian Cancer Society. Survivorship issues were not considered a priority with these overwhelming challenges. Cancer survivorship seemed very abstract. I had huge responsibility of fulfilling my duties as pediatric oncologist. I was convinced that this will be a need of the future and we must make a beginning. I did not get much support initially in the form of dedicated clinic space and protected time to conduct ACT clinic. But I pursued the matter and subsequently, it got organized as a well-established entity at TMH. I have great satisfaction of leaving behind a legacy at time of my retirement which is still going forward and contributing to this field immensely.

On Balancing Career and Other Life Responsibilities

I practiced strict compartmentalization of my workplace and home, never carried forward problems of one compartment to other and tried to give my best at both fronts. My husband, Dr. Arun Kurkure, a surgical oncologist who succumbed to colon cancer in 2012, was my great support and inspiration. He was a Managing Trustee and Hon Secretary of ICS. He was also on the Board of Directors of UICC and was well conversant with holistic approach in cancer care and significance of therapeutic alliances. He was my friend, philosopher and guide who facilitated the execution of my projects and helped in nurturing my dreams. I can never forget the support of my daughter, Dr. Durva Kurkure, now a Radiation Oncologist, who sacrificed small pleasures of childhood in pursuit of my dreams. Unconditional love and support of my parents and extended family have been the greatest strength for me. Almighty is

kind to bless and give me opportunities and physical and mental abilities to continue my work post-retirement, with passion.

My Words of Wisdom for the Next Generation of Female Leaders

My advice to the younger generation now embarking on a career in pediatric oncology will be to pursue a career with passion and not as an instrument for worldly survival. Keep future developments in your focus and identify a niche area which you would like to pursue for the betterment of your patients. Children with cancer are at center stage of all our activities and guide us. Always listen to them and to your heart. We advocate and practice Evidence based Medicine but also respect Experience based Medicine.