



# ROSEMARY SANZ

## BRAZIL

Rosemary Sanz has profoundly impacted paediatric oncology in Brazil. As the driving force behind GACC Vale do Paraíba Hospital, she played a key role in its founding, development, and governance, ensuring thousands of children receive free, life-saving cancer treatment.

In 1995, she gathered volunteers to establish GACC, addressing the urgent need for paediatric cancer support. With vision and determination, she led the organisation from early social assistance initiatives to building a hospital providing 100% free medical care. Under her leadership, the hospital's foundation stone was laid in 2000, and by 2009, it was fully operational, offering outpatient care, surgery, an ICU, and more.

Today, GACC Vale do Paraíba is a model of excellence, recognised for its compassionate, multidisciplinary care. Sanz's vision has turned a dream into reality, ensuring no child with cancer is left without diagnosis or treatment. Her leadership continues to drive innovation, inspiring future generations to uphold this vital mission.

***"No matter where you are in life, remember that there is always room to create something new and bring about change within yourself."***

## On Relationships that Influenced My Career

Two remarkable individuals shaped my dedication to paediatric oncology: Dr Marcelo Milone and Dr Luiz Fernando Lopez.

Dr Marcelo Milone, a devoted paediatric oncologist, transformed my initial connection to this cause into a lifelong mission. His unwavering belief in delivering the highest standard of care to all children with cancer deepened my commitment. His passion, tireless dedication, and constant encouragement gave me the strength to embrace this mission—building a hospital, managing its infrastructure, and securing vital resources.

At every challenge, his support was crucial. In my darkest moments, when obstacles seemed insurmountable, he stood by me, reaffirming, "You can do it. You are capable." His vision, inspired by world-class institutions, drove GACC's transformation from a volunteer initiative into a nationally recognised hospital—a beacon of hope and excellence. Dr Luiz Fernando Lopez played an equally vital role in my journey. In 1995, when my region lacked specialised cancer centres, he was one of the first to advocate for GACC Vale do Paraíba. Believing in community mobilisation, he guided and supported me, introducing me to parents of a patient he had treated in São Paulo. Together, we began the voluntary work that would later evolve into a national reference in paediatric cancer care.

## On Challenges and Overcoming Them

Challenges and resilience have been central to my journey. Working within Brazil's public healthcare system requires unwavering perseverance, as government funding covers only 22% of the true cost of hospital care. Consequently, securing donations and strategic partnerships is vital to maintaining financial sustainability.

Beyond financial challenges, my mission has always been clear: no child or young person should be denied diagnosis and treatment due to their socioeconomic background. Ensuring every family receives timely, high-quality care, without distinction, is a constant challenge.

Another key obstacle has been navigating a male-dominated sector. Gaining respect and a seat at the table demanded discipline, expertise, and the creation of a transparent, efficient governance model.

Two moments were particularly defining in testing my resilience and leadership: The first was the hospital's construction and its certification as a High-Complexity Paediatric Oncology Unit. Over nine years, I faced constant setbacks and was told it "would never work." Yet, through determination, strategic partnerships, and donor

engagement, I turned an impossible vision into a benchmark in paediatric cancer care.

In 2013, a severe financial crisis nearly closed the hospital. I led a public campaign that mobilised the community and spearheaded a governance and financial restructuring, saving the hospital and ensuring its long-term sustainability.

## On Balancing Career and Other Life Responsibilities

The construction of the GACC Vale do Paraíba Hospital and its establishment as a leading paediatric oncology institution required my full commitment to providing high-quality care for children and young people. The hospital's recognition as the Best Hospital in Latin America for Hand Hygiene in 2023, awarded by Professor Didier Pittet, reflects the tireless work dedicated to sustainable growth, innovation, and continuous service improvement.

Determined to ensure every child received dignified, high-quality care, I made a life-changing decision: upon the hospital's inauguration, I left my career as a Classical Ballet Director to fully commit to volunteer leadership at GACC. This commitment was made possible by the unwavering support of my family. My husband, who shares my vision, played a crucial role in my dedication to the hospital. Alongside our children, he not only supported me but actively contributed to building a new reality, proving that when people unite for a greater cause, challenges can be transformed into a legacy of social impact.

## My Words of Wisdom for the Next Generation of Female Leaders

If I could give my 25-year-old self one piece of advice, it would be clear: never doubt your ability to fulfil your purpose, especially when it aligns with God's will for your life.

In a world where doubt and fear often try to silence women's dreams, it's vital to block out negative voices that claim something is impossible. Every woman who has achieved her dreams is one who refused to accept limitations and had the strength to unite others around a shared vision.

Women often balance leadership, personal commitments, and societal expectations. Yet, within this challenge lies unique strength, and with discipline, consistency, and resilience, we all have the power to make a lasting impact. To young women aspiring to leave a legacy, my message is simple: envision the future you want to build, see it clearly, work tirelessly as if everything depends on you, but never stop praying that it unfolds according to God's plan—because His plans are always good, perfect, and pleasing.