

Patient and Family Advisor Spotlight: Cyrene Banerjee

Article by Cyrene Banerjee, SCN Patient and Family Advisor

My family and I migrated to Canada in 2005. During our third year in Calgary, we were buying a home, my husband was writing a book, and I was launching an art gallery that showcased art from both of my countries: Canada, my new country, and India, the one I left behind. On the very day I returned from a visit with artists in India, I knew the cancer bus had hit us. My husband had lost a dangerous amount of weight in just 28 days, and struggled to eat or swallow. The diagnosis – stage 4 esophageal cancer – was effectively a death sentence.

We were plunged headlong into the healthcare system and experienced the best care that we could have imagined. We had good days and some very dark ones. My son and I stayed with my husband every day until he had his final morphine dose each night. The Foothills Hospital became our second home. Despite what we were going through, we knew we had much to be grateful for.

Upon my husband's passing, I spent a lot of time recovering at Wellspring Calgary, a facility that is a gift to anyone touched by cancer. The programs there are extended to the families and caregivers of patients. Having no social networks of my own in this country, mingling with the cheerful guests and staff at Wellspring was a life-saver. Each day I went in despondent and fearful but came out feeling light and having hope.

Overwhelmed by the kindness of strangers, I wanted to give back to the system that gave so much to us. In 2012, I leaped at the opportunity to become a Patient and Community Engagement Researcher (PaCER), and later, when the Diabetes, Obesity and Nutrition (DON) Strategic Clinical Network™ (SCN) opened its doors, I became a Patient Advisor. As a part of the DON SCN core committee, I attend meetings and offer feedback on new programs from a patient and caregiver perspective.



Photo courtesy of Cyrene Banerjee

