

CENTERING STORIES AROUND PEOPLE

A resource on cancer for journalists

Cancer is a leading cause of death worldwide, accounting for an estimated 9.6 million deaths in 2018. Cancer research and therapy receive widespread media coverage. However, voices of those touched by cancer need to be at the forefront of the response to the disease. Ahead of World Cancer Day 2020, we bring to you some suggestions where the voices of those affected can be highlighted.



Stigma and silence surrounding cancer

Stigma or the fear of being discriminated can prevent early diagnosis of cancer and treatment, which are key to preventing deaths. Stigma also affects different genders differently. Beliefs that cancer is the result of a 'sin' are still rife. Lack of awareness on how cancers are caused result in people isolating the affected.

Idea: Highlighting the need to end stigma surrounding cancer by including the narratives of people whose lives have been impacted due to stigma.

Impact on mental health

Coping with cancer diagnosis can take a toll on the mental health of the person affected as well as family members. If left untreated, mental health issues, depression and anxiety being the most common, can lead to poor adherence to treatment, longer, or more frequent hospitalisations, poor prognosis and poor quality of life as well as increased risk of death.

Idea: Including voices of people with cancer or survivors whose mental health was impacted. Highlighting the increased need for counselling, especially in hard-to-reach areas. At the same time, juxtaposing it with voices of people who received psychosocial counselling and how it helped them cope.



Empowering stories

Success stories can raise hope, motivate people to adhere to treatment and move forward in life after cure.

Idea: While stories of cancer survivors scaling the everest are inspiring, to establish a connect with readers, stories closer to home can be explored, including success stories of how survivors/patient support groups are providing peer-group support to cope with cancer.

Public policy and welfare schemes

Cancer can eat into savings and impact the socio-economic status of those it affects. Information on Patient Welfare Schemes under the National Cancer Control Programme as well as state health programmes is essential to your readers.

Idea: Information on travel concessions and updates on available funds and schemes for the affected community can be weaved into the story or provided as an infobox.



Palliative care

Facts and data are key for context, but so are human voices. Assessing the quality of palliative care, low availability in rural areas and keeping the person affected at the centre are key issues.

Idea: Keeping it real - raising awareness on palliative and psychosocial care and rehabilitation by including the narratives of those affected by cancer.

Resources

1. Multiple Stakeholder Perspectives on Cancer Stigma in North India
2. A qualitative exploration of cervical and breast cancer stigma in Karnataka, India
3. Prevalence of depression and anxiety disorder in cancer patients: An institutional experience
4. Assessment of spectrum of mental disorders in cancer patients
5. Empowering cancer patients to shift their mindsets could improve care, researchers argue
6. WHO Cancer Country Profile: India

Centering Stories Around People: A Resource on Cancer for Journalists was developed by REACH with inputs from a journalist as part of our efforts to help improve the quality and frequency of media reporting on NCDs.