

# **Dr. Suresh Advani**

Chief Medical & Paediatric Oncologist  
and  
Haemato - Oncologist.



*Sindh is famous for its saints, derveshes, pirs and faqirs. Various communities have lived there in complete harmony for centuries. In India, we profess secularism, but if someone wants to see it in actuality, he has to delve deep into the lifestyles of Sindhis, whether Hindus or Muslims. The contribution of Sindhi Hindus for independence, their trauma of partition, struggle for rehabilitation in India, contribution towards reconstruction of India; establishment of educational institutions, hospitals, industries, mini and micro manufacturing units; promotion of fine arts, trade and commerce; Sindhis have rendered extraordinary services in literally every field.*

*To maintain a record of these historical events, for our future generations we introduce Dr. Suresh Advani, Head of Oncology Department at Jaslok Hospital, Mumbai.*

*Jawhrani:* Doctor Advaniji, we welcome you. First of all, can you tell us about your ancestral background and to which area of Sindh your forefathers belong; about your childhood and education?

*Dr. Advani:* I cannot recall anything about Sindh as I was born on August 1, 1947. We migrated on August 15, 1947 which obviously left me no time to know anything about Sindh. We lived in Karachi. My maternal grandparents belonged to Sukkur. My father was a businessman in Karachi. We migrated to Devlali. I can recall my days in Devlali to some extent.

*Jawhrani:* So you received your education in India?

*Dr. Advani:* Yes. I did my primary schooling at Sindh Cosmopolitan High School Ghatkopar and that too in Sindhi medium. After completing my S.S.C., I obtained my college education at Somaiya College, Mumbai. I did my M.B.B.S. from Grant Medical College, Mumbai. After that, I got experience from Royal Maskin Hospital, London and then from Fed Hutchinson Cancer Research Centre, Seattle, USA. I studied about blood cancer and bone marrow transplantation in that Institute.

*Jawhrani:* What made you choose the field of cancer?

*Dr. Advani:* In our days in 1974, cancer was regarded as an incurable disease. There appeared a vast scope for research in this field. It was also a great challenge. I started with blood cancer and later on I got complete knowledge about other branches of cancers also.

*Jawhrani:* To the best of my knowledge you were a victim of a polio attack at the tender age of just eight. Did this handicap pose an impediment in your path to progress?

*Dr. Advani:* It was not difficult for me in the school days. I got my education sitting in my wheelchair, but it was difficult to get admission in Grant Medical College, as they had declared me unfit for the same, though I had very good marks. I had to knock at the doors of the court and various other levels. Ultimately, they paid heed to my requests, and then there was no looking back.

*Jawhrani:* Which hospital did you join initially for cancer treatment?

*Dr. Advani:* My first stint was with Tata Memorial Hospital in 1974. Then I proceeded to the U.K and U.S.A for more experience. I developed a new field there, called 'Medical Oncology'. It is nothing but treatment of cancer through medicines. In those days, India lagged

far behind in Oncology and I was instrumental in bringing this to India. We did the first bone marrow transplant in 1981.

*Jawhrani:* Is bone marrow transplant some kind of surgery?

*Dr. Advani:* This is not a surgery, but we have to be extra careful about the patient. First of all, the complete bone marrow of the patient is extracted and then the bone marrow of the sibling, after matching of cells, is transplanted into the patient.

*Jawhrani:* Any risk to the donor?

*Dr. Advani:* No, not to the donor but the patient may face upto 5%. Even then, we take this decision only after all the other options are exhausted. Generally, 60% of patients are cured this way. It is a very important stage of treatment.

*Jawhrani:* The word 'Cancer' is synonymous with death and is such a horrible word to hear. I think, it is called 'Nasoor' in Sindhi. What is it, actually?

*Dr. Advani:* Cancer originates in our normal tissues. Our normal tissues take birth, live and then die in a regulated way but when they behave uncontrollably, it is called cancer. It can happen anywhere in the body. In the mouth, lungs, kidney, brain, blood, bone marrow or any part of the body may be affected with this horrible disease. Then these affected cells start multiplying.

*Jawhrani:* What is the difference between 'Cancer' and 'Tumor'?

*Dr. Advani:* Tumors are of two types, 'Malignant' and 'Benign'. Malignant are cancerous tumors, which may spread from one part of the body to the other, while the other type of tumors are not harmful. They remain at one place only.

*Jawhrani:* What is presently, the success rate in the treatment of cancer?

*Dr. Advani:* A lot has been done in the field of cancer. We presume that up to 50% of the cases can be cured presently, though it was literally 0% in 1974, in the case of blood cancer. Now 70% of blood cancer affected people can be cured completely. A person suffering from blood cancer, lung cancer, breast cancer can be cured completely, if he/she is brought to us at an early stage.

*Jawhrani:* It is said that India tops in the cases of breast cancer? Is this true?

*Dr. Advani:* Actually it is the opposite. In America, every one out of nine

women suffers from breast cancer.

*Jawhrani:* Any specific reason for that?

*Dr. Advani:* The culprit is the lifestyle. When a woman marries at an advanced age and delivers her first child late in life, doesn't breast feed her baby, performs very little physical work and eats junk food, she becomes more prone to breast cancer. You will notice that cases of breast cancer are reported more in urban areas than rural areas. To put it simply, 'Breast Cancer is the disease of a particular lifestyle'.

*Jawhrani:* You have started a 'Helpline' at Jaslok Hospital for creating awareness about breast cancer. Can you elaborate on this?

*Dr. Advani:* Its aim is to make our people aware about this malady. People should not fear it, rather awareness about it will compel them to seek its treatment at an early stage, resulting in its complete cure. A little affected part is removed and rest of the job is done through radiation or chemotherapy. At that stage, we do not have to remove the breast completely.

*Jawhrani:* May we know something more about Chemotherapy?

*Dr. Advani:* Chemotherapy means treatment with the use of medicines. The administered medicines reach every part of the body and destroy all the cancerous cells, whereas radiation is a localized treatment which can eliminate cancerous cells from that specific part of the body which is exposed to radiation.

*Jawhrani:* Which hospitals are you associated with, at the moment?

*Dr. Advani:* Presently, I am working as Director, Cancer Department of Jaslok Hospital, Mumbai and Chairman, Cancer Department of Raheja Hospital. Both these centres are of world-class standard. We provide all the facilities under a single roof. We have also initiated a mobile unit, which goes out and performs Mammography test (for breast cancer) at the patient's place. We are also working on cervical cancer as well as uterus cancer. We emphasize more on awareness, so that the patient has no fear from it and contacts the doctor immediately.

*Jawhrani:* Doctor, you migrated in 1947. In the current scenario do you have any apprehension about the Sindhi language, culture and civilization?

*Dr. Advani:* I obtained my education till S.S.C. in a Sindhi medium school. We

spoke amongst ourselves in Sindhi and do so till date. But now Sindhi schools have shut down, including the school where I studied. As such, children today receive their education in English medium schools. This has been the cause of the setback to our language and culture.

*Jawhrani:* One thing is certain that Sindhi medium schools have not been an impediment to progress. You, Ram Jethmalani, L.K. Advani and several others are living examples of those who have studied in Sindhi medium schools and reached the pinnacle of their careers. Why do people then degrade it and opt for English medium schools?

*Dr. Advani:* The world has become a global village. Everyone wants to be like others. The interaction with other communities has had an impact on the Sindhis, too.

*Jawhrani:* It will definitely harm our language. How do we cope with it?

*Dr. Advani:* First of all, we must be proud of our origin, about being a Sindhi and being inheritors of the ancient and highly civilized nation. Then, we have to communicate with other people and educate them about our past, so that we are looked upon with respect by others.

*Jawhrani:* In order to create awareness and love for Sindhi language, some institutions have initiated easy and simple 'Certificate and Diploma Courses in Sindhi language'. We can even tap our fine arts resources like theatre, stage, music videos and songs etc. for the purpose. Do you have any interest in music or theatre?

*Dr. Advani:* Certainly! I love music. I have many Sindhi cassettes and CDs, which I enjoy listening to in my vehicle while commuting. I am acquainted with many Sindhi artistes too.

*Jawhrani:* Will we not be great losers if we fail to pass on this treasure of our musical heritage to our future generation?

*Dr. Advani:* I think communication in one's mother tongue is the best option and taking primary education in Sindhi would be even better. Many experts have opined that a child can learn more in his mother tongue as compared to learning in an alien language. If this happens, a new respect will be inculcated in our children for their mother tongue.

*Jawhrani:* You have been abroad quite often. You have been meeting

various non-resident Sindhis, too. Are they happier than those in India?

*Dr. Advani:* Sindhis are happy everywhere, whether in India or abroad. They create their own world everywhere, though they have prospered immensely on alien shores. It is sheer hard work and the intuition of Sindhis that has enabled them to reach such heights. Now there is no looking back for them.

*Jawhrani:* Doctor Advanji, we are extremely thankful to you for having spared your valuable time and effort.

*Dr. Advani:* It was a pleasure.