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An Ode To Life

Celebrating the 100th issue of *Good Housekeeping*, we bring you inspiring real-life stories of people who battled all odds and health crises, to emerge winners



MAN, INTERRUPTED

Sameer Sankhe, the 33-year-old MD of a management consultancy in Mumbai, was the quintessential man-in-a-hurry, but a sudden brush with cancer brought things to a grinding halt. **Bhakti Bapat Mathew** finds out how he recovered and what he learnt

A graduate from the prestigious Jamnalal Bajaj B-school in Mumbai, Sameer always enjoyed working hard. Things seemed to be going really well for him both personally and professionally. This seemingly smooth journey however, took a different turn when he was diagnosed with cancer. He met the

news with typical self-assurance and good humour. 'When I was being taken into the operating room, the nurse said I was the first patient she had seen to go into the OT laughing.'

He adds more soberly, 'I feel very lucky to have been cured. I chose to go to the Tata Cancer Hospital in Mumbai, instead of the elite hospitals,

thinking that the doctors at Tata were far more likely to have seen a case like mine. There, I was one of the many patients in the general ward, unlike other hospitals where you have a private room to yourself. My neighbour was a young slum-dweller called Shahrukh, who had lost his eye due to chemotherapy. **Seeing the suffering of others, which was in many cases more than my own, helped me put matters in perspective.** Also, when the doctor visited the patients in my ward, he spoke to me for the least amount of time. I happily concluded, that my condition must not be as severe as that of others!' It's this optimism that helped Sameer get back his health after chemotherapy. 'I was aided in my post-cancer recovery by ayurvedic treatment and more importantly, by the love from my family.'

LESSON 1: Increased focus

'Surviving cancer feels like a gift,' says Sameer. **You quickly learn to focus on what's really important. I no longer fret about what people think or say about me.** I know what's important to me and my family and stick with that.'

LESSON 2: Change happens, slowly

Says Sameer, 'More than the cancer itself, the chemotherapy is the real killer, pun intended,' says Sameer. 'When you're undergoing chemo/radiation for months, you feel this is how it's going to be for the rest of your life. The sick feeling is aggravated by the nausea, weakness and low immunity. If you don't do anything proactively to combat that feeling of despair, you can quickly go down.' So what did he do to combat the low point caused by chemo? 'I came across the book *Great By Choice* by Jim Collins and the approach I instinctively took



The Road Ahead

'Staying healthy and fit has become an important goal in my life. I train every day. I also made my parents train under my own fitness trainer,' says Sameer.

is echoed in the book. The author says **that big obstacles can be handled better by small changes, baby steps** really, that are taken regularly in a disciplined way. When I fell ill after my first three chemo sessions, I realised I needed to create a routine for myself and stick with it, be it daily time slots for drinking water (you need to have 5-6 litres of water every day when undergoing chemo), or sleep and a specific diet. I followed it day-in-and-day-out and that really helped.'

LESSON 3: Greater acceptance

'Cancer, both the period of treatment and recovery, helped me see a lot of humanity and goodness all around. So many people came forward to help, from within my family and outside. And they all helped in their own, individual ways. **What I have realised is that most times, most people try to do their best.** It may not be what you want them to do and what you would expect, but it doesn't make it any less

valuable. I have definitely found greater acceptance of the different natures of people and of course also of what life has to offer.'

LESSON 4: Appreciating family

Sameer says he stopped taking his most intimate support system for granted. 'I found an outpouring of love and attention from my parents, brother, sister-in-law, my nieces, uncles, aunts, cousins, and close friends. This support system of family and extended family is unique to countries such as India. I can never completely give back the love and help that they gave. But I now appreciate my support system more and try to be there more. Back in my pre-cancer days, I was definitely more individualistic and freedom-loving. The reciprocation of love from my side today is much more intentional.'

LESSON 5: Spirituality & positivity

'I have always been a positive and spiritual person, although not religious. And my belief in my spiritual guru helped me in the trying times. I think meditation too worked. It's hard when you don't have a lot of energy required for the concentration. But as challenging as it is, it also has benefits. It helps you stay happier and at peace in given situations.'