



FIJI NATIONAL
UNIVERSITY

FNU NIKUA

pinktober

NO ONE
FIGHTS ALONE

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FNU PARTNERS WITH FIJI
CANCER SOCIETY TO DESIGN
INFORMATION RESOURCES

A DAY AT THE CLINIC

FNU partners with Fiji Cancer Society to design information resources



During the 2019 Pinktober launch. Picture SUPPLIED

Having the correct information is an essential factor in helping Fijians undertake the necessary adjustments required to ensure they maintain a healthy and well-balanced lifestyle.

Adopting an active lifestyle with exercise and proper diet plan, according to research, leads to better physique and boosts confidence and self-esteem. This allows people to also become positive influencers to their family, friends and community. Short-term benefits of exercise include decreased stress and improved cognitive function.



The Fiji Cancer Society (FCS) Chief Executive Officer, Belinda Chan highlighted this as the reason why cancer education was an essential objective of the Society’s operations.

“Cancer is a condition that can be prevented, and we believe that educating the public and getting the right information across that cancer does not equal death can be a way of getting people to be more alert and aware of the different signs and symptoms,” Chan said.

“Our message of advocacy is strongly to encourage people to

take proactive measures and always to be aware of their health status.”

The Society conveys information to the general public through various means such as presentations at village community halls and interactive group discussions and by providing resource materials that include flyers, booklets and pamphlets.

Partnership with Fiji National University (FNU)

To produce these materials, the Society previously had to work according to its resources available.

This would now be a thing of the past as it has recently partnered with FNU for the designing of all its Information, Education and Communication (IEC) Materials.

“We are grateful of this partnership which comes at an opportune time, as FNU has been supportive of all our graphic design requests which are done free of charge,” Chan stated.

“We are truly blessed to be having support from them.”

“This will help the Society boost our information impartation through the printed resources as well as online so that we inform as many people as possible.”

Being educated on the signs and symptoms of breast and other forms of cancer has undoubtedly produced the desired result for the Society.

Chan said this was evident through the number of people coming in at earlier stages of cancer, receiving calls from individuals booking themselves in for a screening and taking proactive measures to reduce the risk of these conditions.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Nigel Healey said that, as the national university, FNU was honoured to partner with an organisation that also served the nation through the services it provides.

“When the idea to produce creative work for the Society was pitched to us, we readily agreed as it closely aligns with our own goals to improve health and wellness.”

“Although we are still finalising the details, we have already begun designs free of charge, as this is Pinktober – the month dedicated to breast cancer awareness.”

“This underpins the institution’s commitment to corporate social responsibility, and we acknowledge the work of our staff at the Division of Marketing and Communications (DMC).”

“The lives of many of our students and staff at FNU have been affected by some cancer in one way or the other, and we see this as our way of contributing to the cause so that No One Fights Alone.”

Imparting information

When dealing with a condition such as breast cancer, people immediately think of the medical implications such as treatment, clinics, chemotherapy and its costs.

While FCS provides support services in this regard, Chan re-emphasised the importance it placed on cancer education.

“After conducting several awareness sessions and screening programs, we found out that some are too scared to go the hospital and get themselves checked because of that deep fear of the unknown,” she said.

“We cannot emphasise enough the importance of early detection and that some cancers are curable if you detect it early.”

“So, yes, getting the right information is important in our fight for a cancer-free nation.”

Fiji Cancer Society

FCS is a non-government organisation dedicated to assisting those diagnosed with all forms of cancer.

The Society focuses on patient support services, awareness and outreach programs, early detection of cancers, health promotion and advocacy.

Currently, more than 360 patients are registered with FCS, of which 129 are breast cancer patients. Three of these patients are male breast cancer patients.

“For 26 years, we have proudly provided a range of services, including medications when they are not under the government free medical list, transportation to come in for clinics and drop-offs, visa and passport fees, boat transfers and home visits for those patients being cared for at home,” Chan said.

“We also assist with medical and personal supplies such as oxygen, diapers, groceries, wheelchairs, toiletry packs, colostomy bags, and bras and prosthesis for patients recovering from breast surgery.”

“We have an active Survivors’ Network where people can meet and share with others who have had a similar experience, and if wish to, they can be involved in the delivery of our programs, events and services.”

“All our patient support services, our education and screening programs are carried out because of the financial support we receive from individuals and corporations and we are indeed blessed.”

A day at the clinic



"In 2018, it was estimated that 627,000 women died from breast cancer – that is approximately 15% of all cancer deaths among women."

World Health Organization

Rising early in the morning, Thelma quickly attends to her household chores before getting ready to visit the gynaecology clinic at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital (CWMH) for a routine breast and cervical cancer check-up.

Thelma arrives at the clinic soon after 10 am. The clinic is lined with bright pink flowers and balloons, with informative flyers on cancer awareness and women's healthcare taped to the wall. Similar information is captured in brochures lined up on the table.

Beside the table are rows of chairs lined up which are occupied by females of all ages and ethnic backgrounds. The pink theme is a tribute to Pinktober – the month of October dedicated to breast cancer awareness.

After a 45-minute wait, Thelma's name is called, and she is directed to enter Room 1. At the entrance, Thelma is greeted by Fiji National University's (FNU), College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (CMNHS) Assistant Professor, Dr Pushpa Nusair and fifth-year Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) student, Simran Udit.

The senior academic, who spends her time at the hospital attending to patients, said the clinic opens five days a week and women visited as per their scheduled dates.

"After a brief discussion with the women, where we gather information on any changes since her last clinic and read the results of any tests that may have been conducted the last time, we then invite her to sit in a comfortable position atop the bed and we perform the physical examination," Dr Nusair said.

Breast self-examination

At this point, and with Thelma's consent, Dr Nusair calls in a few other MBBS students to the clinic to listen and observe while she outlines the steps of breast self-examination to Thelma.

After clearly explaining the steps, Dr Nusair clarifies any questions Thelma has and engages the students to create a first-hand learning environment.

"When you people become doctors, you must teach this to every woman," she encouraged the students.

"For every female patient you see, you should try and talk to them about breast self-examination."

"A woman may come with high blood pressure, she may come with diabetes or other medical conditions, but if you teach every woman how to do a breast self-examination, you can help reduce the rate of breast cancer deaths in Fiji as they will be able to present early and receive necessary treatment."

After dismissing the students, Dr Nusair then speaks to Thelma on other ways she could reduce the risk of breast cancer.

Lifestyle modification

"An important factor is lifestyle modification. This is eating the right food and exercising daily," she said.

"Be educated about the food you eat. We think of buying apples, but guava is higher in vitamins. We think of buying pears, but our local fruits are much better."

"Things that we must reduce in our diet is salt, oil and sugar."

According to the medical institution, Mayo Clinic, research indicates that changes to a person's lifestyle could decrease the risk of breast cancer.

The number one-ranked hospital in America reports some changes can be through limiting alcohol, avoiding smoking, controlling weight and being physically active. Mothers were also encouraged to breastfeed.

Dr Nusair concluded the visit by informing Thelma of her next appointment in a month.

Thelma's experience

"I have decided to make my health a priority, so I am committed to getting regular check-ups," Thelma said.

"I will also go and spread the word to my workmates, family and friends about all that I have learnt here today so that we all ensure a healthier and safer life."

Thelma said one of the encouraging factors of visiting the clinic was that Dr Nusair and the interns made her feel very comfortable through-out the examination.

"We are dealing with very private examinations so we must always get feedback from the woman to ensure they are comfortable at all times during their time with us," Dr Nusair said.

"Getting their feedback will not only benefit the both of you during that period, but it will also enable you to better your medical practice going forward."

"This is all part of the common call for women, to be aware of breast cancer and its symptoms as early detection is crucial."

Students advocate on breast cancer awareness

Student Simran Udit also shared her experiences conducting advocacy for breast cancer awareness during her Community Medicine component of the MBBS programme.

"I feel that the breast cancer rate is high because when I was doing community medicine, we went out into the villages and found that they heard about breast cancer, but they didn't know how to recognise it, they didn't know how to conduct the self-examination," she said.

"Sometimes, they may find a lump or something abnormal but would never seek medical attention as they feel like it would just go away on its own."

"This is why creating awareness is important, so that people have knowledge on the issue and can do the right thing, which is visiting a medical centre for a review."

Fellow classmate Yash Bahadur Singh added that conducting his internship at Oxfam during his Community Medicine unit provided him greater understanding regarding cancer. He was able to confidently share this knowledge with those who visited the clinic and in the community.

"We visited a village in Tailevu for an awareness session, and it was good to see the women listening attentively. We also included the men of the village so that they would be aware of what the women would go through," Singh said.

"We showed them how to conduct breast self-examination using an FNU model. Many even learnt then that men could also get breast cancer."

"I will continue to spread the message on self-examination, and early detection for the benefit of both our men and women," the FNU student stated confidently.



Dr Pushpa Nusair (second from left) and FNU MBBS students talk to a patient about breast self-examination.

Breast Self-Examination is critical – Dr Choudhari



Dr Abhay Choudhari (left).

A significant population of women in Fiji are not aware of Breast Self-Examination (BSE) and spreading this awareness may help these women to seek medical help promptly.

The Fiji National University’s (FNU) College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences’ (CMNHS) Assistant Professor of Surgery, Dr Abhay Choudhari, made these comments after he recently conducted a BSE research project to look at the proportion of women in the Central and Western division in Fiji, who performed BSE for breast cancer detection.

“In summary, we found out that the majority of women in this study population believed that breast cancer could be detected early and early detection of breast cancer increases the chances of survival,” stated Dr Choudhari.

“Fiji does not have mammography screening program for early detection of breast cancer and BSE or clinical breast examination may be the alternatives to be considered in a resource-limited setting.”

Fellow researcher, Chandra Dayal, also a Lecturer in Nursing, said BSE could detect signs of breast cancer very early and provide time for women to seek appropriate medical care.

“It is important that women understand the value of BSE, which creates a deeper understanding of their own body. If a woman is familiar with her breasts and knows what is normal, then it becomes easier for her to promptly report any changes,” Dayal commented.

“BSE is when a woman regularly examines or checks her breast on her own. BSE is a convenient, no-cost tool that a woman can use regularly and at any age to detect any signs of breast cancer.”

“Ideally, it is done after the menstrual cycle, and the technique of performing BSE is very simple. Generally, women do perform BSE but not so much regularly.”

According to Dayal, the confidence to perform BSE was upon receiving adequate information which enabled women to make informed choices.

“Woman need support and motivation from health workers in a non-judgmental way for them to continue BSE and become advocates in their homes and their communities.”

“Breast cancer is the most common cancer in Fiji and most patients present at an advanced stage when surgical treatment may or may not be possible, and the prognosis remains guarded.”



HERE IS A STEP BY STEP OUTLINE OF HOW BSE CAN BE PERFORMED

STEP
01

Stand in front of a mirror with your shoulders straight and your arms on your hips. Look at your breasts for any change in size, shape, symmetry. Look for skin changes such as redness, dimpling or puckering. Look at the nipples for deformities such as distortion, deviation, destruction.



STEP
02

Raise your arms and look for the same changes.

STEP
03

Gently squeeze each nipple between your thumb and index finger for discharge which could be milky, greenish, straw-coloured or bloody



Lie down and place a folded towel under your right shoulder. Place your right hand behind your head. With your left hand feel your right breast between the fingers held flat together and the chest wall working your way around the breast using small circular motions. Switch sides and repeat.

STEP
04

STEP
05

While standing, raise your right arm behind your head to spread out the breast tissue and with your left hand feel your right breast between the fingers held flat together and the chest wall working your way around the breast using small circular motions. Switch sides and repeat



Note: Consult your nearest medical centre or clinics for any abnormalities or doubts.

Study proposed to understand breast cancer-related challenges and how to address them



Dr Parneet Harish (second from left) conducting a surgery.

Late presentation or delay in medical consultation has been one of the significant challenges in treating breast cancer cases in Fiji. To get a better understanding of the reasons and possible contributing factors behind its occurrence, Dr Parneet Harish, a student in Postgraduate Diploma in Surgery at Fiji National University's (FNU) College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (CMNHS), has proposed to conduct a research.

Dr Harish recently submitted a research proposal on 'Why women present late in breast cancer in Fiji?' to his College supervisors and is currently awaiting to submit it to the College committee for approval.



The Surgical Registrar at Colonial War Memorial Hospital (CWMH), is optimistic that through his research, a better understanding on challenges faced by patients as well as how medical services can be made easier for cancer patients will be discovered. He further hopes that from the outcomes, further efficiency can be incorporated in the current breast cancer screening

system.

"There have been talks about the self-breast examination. Women are encouraged to see a doctor or visit the nearest health facility if they feel a lump, but there is no official screening for breast cancer," said Dr Harish.

"Through my research, I hope to find the reasons for women presenting late and what are their major challenges. Perhaps there will be important lessons learnt, and we could implement some of the outcomes to curb the issues of late presentation."

Being in the profession for the past six years, Dr Harish shared with the FNUNIKUA team on the issues and challenges he has observed over the years in dealing with breast cancer cases.

Greater awareness

Dr Harish commended the various awareness initiatives being undertaken around the country on breast cancer but added

more needed to be done to break the silence in some cultures.

"We have had cases where women have suffered in silence for long periods and only to get medical attention when the smell and pain becomes unbearable," said the medical professional.

"Especially, in our setting when herbal medicine is considered the first option – women often present to us after they have gone through the herbal treatment and the disease becomes locally advanced. At this stage, it becomes challenging to cure the disease."

"By this time, the ladies have gone through so much of pain and pressure and then when we start talking about taking their breasts out and giving them chemotherapy – these things really weighs down on them," he added.

According to Dr Harish, women have the option of conserving affected breast, but this treatment is currently unable in Fiji. He said breast-conserving treatment can be done abroad but it is an expensive exercise.

"There is something called sentinel lymph node biopsy, this is done in the early stages of the breast cancer to prevent complication associated with axillar dissection and extended surgery. There is even the option of radiotherapy – where we can perform breast-conserving surgery if the patient presents with a small lump. This will mean taking out the lump and giving radiotherapy."

Dr Harish said cancer takes a physical and emotional toll on patients and their families and one of his key tasks is to educate patients and their families of the surgical procedures as well as the recovery period.

"We answer all questions from patients and provide them with guidance on the treatment process. This is how we make them feel comfortable and ready to proceed with treatment."

Dr Harish said given the delicate process, they at times also consult with specialists in Australia and New Zealand regarding certain cases.

"We have multidisciplinary meetings every Wednesday, where all the teams sit together and see what's the best solution to the cases."

Breaking down barriers

Creating awareness is everyone's responsibility. Dr Harish believes a multi-pronged approach to such an important topic needs to be encouraged. He said it's essential for leaders to encourage regular dialogue regarding health issues in community meetings.

"We need to encourage more discussions on such important topics. Cancer takes lives, and we have to create greater level of awareness and stop the loss of innocent lives," said Dr Harish.

He is also urging more females to join the field of surgery.

According to Dr Harish, there are only three females amongst the 20 registrars at the CWM Hospital, and sometimes this also contributes as a barrier for women to come up to a male doctor and be open about their sickness.

Family support

Husbands and immediate family members need to provide support to their spouses and mothers so they can be strong and get through the turmoil. Dr Harish said such medical sickness creates stressful situations, and one of the best ways to cope with it is through strong family support.

"We have to understand that patients are going through so much emotionally when they are diagnosed with cancer and if families can provide them encouragement and support they will feel stronger and beat the diseases," he said.

He said such family support encourages the patients to undertake treatment and that it was also associated with a lower risk for depression.

Dr Harish encouraged patients and families to also reach out to organisations such as the Fiji Cancer Society who can provide specialised support and guidance.



"Breast cancer is the most frequent cancer among women, impacting 2.1 million women each year, and also causes the greatest number of cancer-related deaths among women."

World Health Organization

Kumar shares experience working with Cancer patients

Becoming an oncology nurse is more than just taking classes, earning credits and receiving a degree, says twenty-six-year-old Bhavna Namrata Kumar, who is one of the familiar faces at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital's (CWMH) Oncology Department in Suva.

A graduate from the Fiji National University's (FNU) College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (CMNHS), Kumar said her fascination with work done by those in the medical sector encouraged her to pursue a career in nursing.

"I graduated with a Diploma in Nursing from FNU in 2014," said Kumar.

Kumar completed her internship at CWM Hospital and took up a permanent position shortly after her graduation. She completed her public health attachment at Lakeba Hospital before moving to CWM Hospital's Oncology Unit.

Despite her busy schedule, Kumar continued her studies and graduated with Bachelors of Nursing from TISI Sangam School of Nursing earlier this year.

Working in the Oncology department comes with a lot of responsibility and Kumar says, as a Nurse one has to be compassionate and caring towards patients.

"My regular duties include setting up the unit for the day, attending to outpatients we get in the unit, administering chemotherapy, assisting in breast and

medical clinics conducted in the unit and managing and treating walk-in patients," explained Kumar.

The connection with patients and their family members fuels Kumar's passion to give her best each day.

"We believe that we need to understand the patient and their family members very well. We have noticed that not all patients react to the news of cancer the same way. Emotions of the patient and their family, plus the patient's safety and care is our topmost priority," Kumar said.

Having served a year in the Oncology Ward, Kumar said providing care to patients and seeing them recover provides medical professionals such as her, a great relief and satisfaction.

"The best feeling is to see a patient and family overcome the disease which they had been battling for so long."

According to Kumar, Breast cancer is treatable and manageable if patients show up early.

"Anyone can have breast cancer regardless of whether they are male or female. Age used to be a factor, however, we are getting patients in their 30s diagnosed with breast cancer," said Kumar.

"Maybe due to our social and cultural norms, we are often reluctant to share intimate problems with others, hence most patients don't end up in the hospital until it's too late," she added.



Fundraising for a worthy cause

Fiji National University's (FNU) Division of Finance organised a series of fundraising activities – selling snacks and small goodies including Pink ribbons to raise greater awareness about Cancer and make a monetary contribution to the Fiji Cancer Society.

While there is a whole month dedicated to the awareness of this disease, it is also essential to speak about how the financial pressure of cancer takes an emotional toll on the patient and the family.

Receiving a cancer diagnosis and going through treatment is emotionally exhausting. Not only does it worry the patient about whether the treatment will work and what the side impacts will be, but he or she has to deal with the high financial cost of cancer care as well.

The Finance Division has been holding similar fundraising initiatives annually since 2014.

Natasha Autar from the Department of Financial Accounting, who has been spearheading this project since its inception said while national events are organised to create Cancer awareness, the team also wanted to lend their support.

"We start the month with selling Pink ribbons, and Pink rose pens. We also had staff bringing snacks and other goodies that were sold at the University," said Autar.

"For the first time this year, we also sold tickets for \$2

to win more than \$40 worth of food hamper each week."

Autar said support from staff at the University was overwhelming.

"This is our small way of giving back to the community. The response from everyone at FNU was very encouraging. Our collections have increased each year which is a positive sign."

The Financial Accountant said the fundraising initiative has made the team realise that dealing with the emotional toll of cancer-related financial stress is a tremendous challenge.

"There is a lot of material available on the internet from the latest stats, self-breast examination to other awareness notes about breast cancer. However, the financial burden even after treatment is less talked about."

"Even if the treatment cost is covered through insurance or other means, there are other daily expenses that the patient has to cater for. I believe at this stage, it becomes a matter of prioritising your spending, which starts with a detailed budget."

"Therefore, apart from creating awareness about breast cancer stats, treatment and examination, it is imperative to bring to the attention of the people, the financial stress caused because of the diagnosis of breast cancer," Autar added.

Health & Wellness – A Vital Component in the fight against Cancer

The Fiji National University is ensuring no stones are left unturned in its contribution to the fight against cancer.

While information on healthy tips is continuously shared with staff, partnering with Fiji Cancer Society for their graphics work, the University has also organised inter departmental sports competition.

All departments are encouraged to participate in the mixed volley ball and netball competition to achieve healthier life style. This also aligns to the University's objective of combating NCDs and having a healthier workforce.

The competition will continue through during the Movember campaign.



FNU's Division of Finance team



Family support imperative – CMNHS Alumna

Ensuring cancer patients have access to unwavering family support and care are important components to the challenging, emotional and painful journey to recovery and life normalcy.

Narishna Naidu, an alumna of the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (CMNHS), clearly recalls the turmoil her family went through after her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer.

The soft-spoken Naidu, who graduated with a Bachelor of Pharmacy in 2008, recalls the ordeal which almost led to her failing her high school examinations due to the additional pressure.

While the incident occurred 19 years ago, Naidu says she remembers the time as if it just happened yesterday.

“My mother went for her treatment in Australia and I could not focus on my school work. My principal and other school staff had to take me through some counselling sessions before I pulled through,” she said.

Not knowing what breast cancer was, she thought it was just some sickness that her mother would recover from.

“I was not as worried as I am now because at the time I did not know cancer could take lives.”

Her mother had noticed an unusual lump on her breast in 1999 but it took her one year before she gained enough courage to visit the Hospital.

“Initially my mother thought it was nothing and upon going to the hospital and consulting doctors, it was confirmed that she had breast cancer in the year 2000,” she added.

Naidu highlighted that at the time, awareness on breast cancer was not readily available and they had to do a lot of research on their own and with the support of her father and family members, her mother went to Australia for treatment.

After six months of treatment, her mother returned cancer-free.

“Our experience was quite traumatic and shocking and my mother could not sleep well.”

However, her family support and care was motivation enough to help her get back to normal life post-treatment.

Naidu’s mother was an Assistant Head Teacher of Labasa Sangam Primary School when she was diagnosed with breast cancer and after the treatment, she went on to become the Head Teacher of Coqeloa Sangam Primary

School and Bulileka Primary School, where she retired from teaching eight years ago.

A buoyant personality, her mother, now spends time with her family and granddaughter and also continues to be a cancer advocate.

“We continue to share our experience with family and in the community so that we can help people recover or at least encourage them to get their check-ups done,” Naidu said.

Despite the challenges, Naidu, is now a role

model in her community and manages her own pharmacy.

Her advice is: “if you find anything unusual on your breast, seek immediate medical attention before going for any massage or herbal treatment”.

“Family support is very important and if you were there in good times then you need to be by your wife, mother or daughter on rainy days too.”



Narishna Naidu (left) with her mother, Narsamma Naidu.

Nurse Kumar encourages more awareness on Cancer in communities



The dedication of October as a breast cancer awareness month provides people with an opportunity to get involved in activities and hold discussions on early detection, timely treatment and the impact cancer has on families.

Experienced nurse Saras Kumar said it is fantastic to see that the issue of breast cancer is being taken seriously, however more needs to be done in communities to break the stigma.

According to Nurse Kumar, incorrect information sometimes delays women from receiving treatment on time.

“We need to keep emphasising that women who feel a lump on their breasts need to seek urgent medical assistance,” stressed Kumar.

“The education on breast cancer needs to be heavily broadcasted in our communities so that we can save the loss of any lives due to cancer.”

Kumar, who is employed at the Fiji National University (FNU) as a nurse based at Natabua Campus, Lautoka said it was encouraging to see more staff and students requesting for information regarding breast cancer screening in general.

“Advocacy during October has assisted our staff and students to know the importance of mammograms and talk about issues relating to breast health”, she said.

Kumar said breast cancer is an issue that people should be concerned about all year long and not just October.

“Here at the FNU clinic, we diagnosed two women with breast cancer, and they were able to get timely medical assistance,” revealed Kumar.

“This was only possible because these women were aware of the signs of breast cancer and knew the importance of early detection. The awareness had prepared them, and they were not blown away when they were diagnosed with breast cancer,” she said.

Kumar recommends all women to start mammogram screenings if they have a strong family history, as early detection is ideal.

“The idea is to catch something early—your treatment options are better,” she said.

She encourages everyone to conduct self- breast exams once a month.

“Both males and females, please remember –when you get ready just don’t look at the mirror to see how beautifully you are dressed for the day –take a few minutes to look for signs in the breast,” she said.

Kumar encourages everyone to stay healthy and do regular exercise, maintain a healthy diet and weight, avoid excess alcohol and quit smoking.



“More than a third of breast cancer cases can be prevented by controlling factors such as weight, physical activity, alcohol use and breastfeeding.”

“Most types of breast cancer are estrogen-related. Many of the recommended preventative measures involve keeping estrogen level low.”

World Health Organization



Caring for children with Cancer

Standing tall in his hospital scrubs, curiously looking through the file of a young toddler before greeting him in a cheery voice, which is instantly reciprocated with a generous smile from the patient. This is how Dr Savenaca Seduadua, the Pediatric Registrar at CWMH usually starts his daily shift consulting and checking on his young patients who are suffering from various kinds of cancer.

The Oncology Unit of the Pediatric Department is a particular unit dedicated to children who are suffering from cancer.

Speaking about his work, Dr Seduadua says, “My work is general paediatrics which includes ICU care of children and newborns as well as pediatric oncology. I enjoy the satisfaction of presenting healthy kids who initially came in very sick back to their family.”

Growing up, Dr Seduadua did not doubt that he would be a doctor one day. “Medicine has always been of interest to me and so growing up I took up Science subjects in high school to ensure that I would be able to pursue that goal,” he said.

Tertiary Life and Career

Originally from Muanaicake, Vutia in Rewa, Dr Seduadua grew up in Suva and completed the Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) programme at the Fiji School of Medicine (FSM) which is now the Fiji National University’s College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (CMNHS).

Reminiscing his FSM days, Dr Seduadua says, “Thinking of my undergrad days brings back happy memories, living in the dorms, having tea with my classmates all in one room and conversing away.”

Adding on, he said, “My family was always supportive of my studies at FSM. In my second year, however, we had some difficulties as my father had passed away. My mother had to support my brothers and me by herself. We are fortunate that she prioritised education and ensured that we finished our studies and had good jobs.”

The six-year MBBS journey began in 2006 and ended in 2011. He completed his one-year medical internship at the Lautoka Hospital and had his first posting as a Medical Officer in Ra Subdivision.

After two years, he was posted to the CWMH as a Paediatric Registrar. He used the opportunity to complete the Post Graduate Diploma in Child Health Programme at FNU in 2017.

Pediatric Oncology Unit

Most of the children coming into the Oncology Unit are on chemotherapy, which weakens their immune systems, therefore, making them vulnerable to various illnesses.

“Unlike other sick children, when a pediatric oncology patient is sick, they are admitted irrespective of how mild the sickness

is,” he shared.

“The other thing that makes them different as well is that because of the chemotherapy that they receive, children can be very fastidious with food, so we usually give them a preferential diet facilitated by the hospital dietician,” he added.

The Oncology Unit rooms are painted with cartoon characters and have the comforts the child and the family would appreciate. For example, the room has a television, a fridge as well as air conditioning. The objective is to make the patient and their family as comfortable as possible.

According to Dr Seduadua, the challenges faced in oncology is mostly to do with end life care, especially with those patients whose cancers cannot be treated. This can be quite difficult for the medical staff and most of all the patient’s families.

“The rooms in oncology are private rooms so if the patients need to be admitted, we try and minimise visitation restrictions as much

as possible and accommodate for any last religious rites, etc that the family needs. We also involve counselling centres if needed. We do this to assist the families in coping with the situation,” he said.

“I like working in pediatric oncology because of the primary care relationship over a long period. As patients are diagnosed with treatable cancer (certain leukemia and kidney tumour cases) usually receive treatment over a long period, so I get to know them and their families better. I can develop a relationship which I cherish.”

Advice to the General Public

According to Dr Seduadua, cancer has always been thought of as a “death sentence”, but that is not the case anymore. Few childhood cancers can now be treated in Fiji such as certain cancers of the blood, kidney, eye, and so on.

Dr Seduadua says that pediatric cancers present itself very differently.



“These are non-specific meaning their manifestation may mimic other diseases such as the common flu. There is a common mnemonic (pictured below) that has been formulated that represents “red flags” and is highly suggestive of malignancy to help parents and guardians,” he said.

- C** Continued, unexplained weight loss
- H** Headaches, often with early morning vomiting
- I** Increased swelling or persistent pain in bones, joints, back, or legs
- L** Lump or mass, especially in the abdomen, neck, chest, pelvis, or armpits
- D** Development of excessive bruising, bleeding, or rash
- C** Constant infections
- A** A whitish color behind the pupil
- N** Nausea which persists or vomiting without nausea
- C** Constant tiredness or noticeable paleness
- E** Eye or vision changes which occur suddenly and persist
- R** Recurrent or persistent fevers of unknown origin

“Presence of one or more of these signs in children is an indication for presenting to the nearest health centre or hospital for evaluation by a medical professional,” he added.

Dr Seduadua is currently pursuing a Masters of Medicine in Pediatrics from FNU. He aims to complete that and eventually obtain a specialist registration in paediatrics.