



#HEALTH & FITNESS

The woman behind Bangladesh's holistic cancer care initiatives

Mahzabin Ferdous, known for her contribution to Bangladesh's corporate branding, communications, and PR landscape, is among those who lost not one, but six family members to cancer. Raised in a close-knit family, surrounded by the warmth of her grandparents, aunts, and uncles, Mahzabin developed a deep sense of community from an early age. She recalls her childhood as what many would call a picture-perfect joint family. That warm picture, however, was slowly overshadowed by cancer, where Mahzabin endured losing loved ones, including her parents.

"I saw cancer taking away both my grandfathers and my aunts, and I was in my early 20s when I saw cancer slowly taking over my mother's health," Mahzabin recalls.

She adds, "Although I went ahead to pursue a career in marketing and PR, at the back of my mind, I knew that I would work on cancer in some form or another. Having seen it so closely and how it affected the people I love, I felt I couldn't do much back then, and that left a dent."

Early in her career, Mahzabin had decided that she would work for about 10 years before creating something of her own that reflected her values. And after building a career with renowned names such as



Samsung and IPDC, she knew it was time to begin her own path towards not just entrepreneurship but to giving back to the community.

Today, she stands as a cofounder of boutique communications and content creators' platform CThreeSixty, and The Marvel Be You, while actively representing Bangladesh Cancer Aid Trust (BANCAT) — an organization dedicated to supporting and caring for cancer patients and their families throughout their journey.

Coming across BANCAT was a calling that Mahzabin knew she wanted to pursue ever since losing her mother.

Care as a tool to heal

Guided by the belief that "Care is Cure," BANCAT is a holistic care platform for cancer fighters across Bangladesh, especially designed for patients from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who often remain unaware of how to navigate a daunting disease.

To date, BANCAT has supported over 2,000 cancer patients, or warriors — as BANCAT calls them, through accommodation, financial assistance,

and emotional well-being. Their support branches through several impactful initiatives: Alok Nibash — is Bangladesh's first cancer care home; Alok Katha — handmade katha, or traditional quilts, embroidered by family members of the warriors attending them; Alokton — a platform providing mental wellness counselling to warriors and their families, which is also open for every individual from all walks of life navigating the trauma of a terminal illness.

However, the ambition to support the warriors of this terminal illness does not end here. Keeping the value of holistic care at its core, BANCAT is now on its way to developing what could be Bangladesh's, and possibly the world's first-ever Cancer Care Village.

Having witnessed the devastation of cancer firsthand and seeing its impact every day on people, Mahzabin and her team are determined to ensure that the Care Village is designed to be a multi-functional care and wellness centre. It aims to integrate not only medical services but also residential facilities, recreational areas, and mental health support, bringing all of BANCAT's initiatives under one umbrella.

While Alok Nibash today accommodates nearly 90 cancer patients travelling to Dhaka from as far as Nilphamari for the treatment, the future Care Village aims to extend its residential support to almost 250 patients at a time.

"The vision is simple," Mahzabin says. "To stand for sustainability while being the ultimate care hub for not only cancer but any terminal disease. We are still in the awareness-building stage through various collaborations. We see too many heartbreaking incidents where families disown a patient simply because they don't know how to navigate such a situation. The issue is not the disease itself but detecting and treating it early, while knowing how to care for it."

To tackle this at a mass level, the long-term goal also includes building a chain of smaller care hubs at the Thana and Upazila levels, ensuring care-related facilities and guidance are available to those who feel lost or are afraid when a disease is initially detected.

By Sanjida Tanny
Photo: Courtesy

The World Health Organization (WHO) predicts that by 2050, the number of new cancer cases across the world will reach 35 million. In Bangladesh alone, cancer is responsible for 11.9 per cent of all deaths annually. As per Bangladesh Medical University's Department of Public Health and Informatics (DPHI), almost 53 new cases are reported per 100,000 people every year. This means every year, nearly 90,000 people and their families in Bangladesh are affected by a disease that could turn terminal when not treated early and snatch away a loved one.