



MOTHERS in MEDICINE

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Leadership ROOTED IN COMPASSION

In the high-stakes world of healthcare, leadership requires more than administrative precision; it demands a deep-rooted heart for service. Ardra Kurien, the Chief Executive Officer of Unico Hospitals, exemplifies this balance. A visionary leader who moved from Kerala to Bangladesh to build an institution from the ground up, Kurien draws her greatest strengths from motherhood.

The Daily Star (TDS): Looking back at your journey, what specific moment made you realise you were building something truly meaningful?

Ardra Kurien (AK): My perspective changed profoundly in 2011 when I was involved in establishing a cancer centre. A patient told me that, although they lived with constant physical pain and discomfort, the suffering seemed to ease the moment they walked through our hospital doors. They felt our receptionist did not merely see them as a patient, but treated them like family, asking after relatives with genuine care. That was the first time I saw a place where human warmth could soften even the most severe suffering.

TDS: How would you define leadership in your own words?

AK: I have always considered myself a servant leader. For me, leadership is never about sitting comfortably behind a desk or issuing orders from a distance. True leadership is about creating a culture in which my team feels



ARDRA KURIEN

Chief Executive Officer
Unico Hospitals

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empowered to take the same initiatives I would. I firmly believe I can do nothing alone; only when the entire team moves forward together do we make an impact.

TDS: As a mother and a CEO, you carry two powerful identities. What has motherhood taught you that has made you a stronger leader?

AK: Raising my daughters has been my greatest education. It made me realise that children are not simply a reflection of their parents; they have their own thoughts and ideals. Motherhood gave me the serenity to accept what I cannot change, the courage to change what I can, and the wisdom to recognise the difference. That perspective helps me lead with patience and a deeper understanding of different viewpoints.

TDS: In moments of extreme pressure, what helps you stay steady, focused, and forward-looking?

AK: In healthcare, no two days are ever the same. Each morning brings fresh challenges and unexpected hurdles. I have learnt that even if the previous day was exhausting, the next day demands new energy and motivation. I believe in restarting every morning with a clear mind and a clean slate.

TDS: What mindset do you believe women leaders need to thrive in the

healthcare industry?

AK: To thrive in healthcare, the most basic requirement is empathy; you must love people. Building human relationships and understanding different perspectives is essential. For women who want to grow in this sector, I suggest a mindset of stretching yourself in every possible way. That means being ready to give extra hours to service while continuing to develop your professional knowledge.

TDS: Was there a time when you had to make a bold decision that others doubted, but you trusted your instinct?

AK: Choosing to come to Bangladesh to lead Unico Hospitals was that moment. I was originally from Kerala, where I was in a comfortable position at a prestigious institution. When my management asked me to take up this challenge, I decided to come here alone. Many people doubted my choice and suggested I look for easier options elsewhere. But my dedication, and seeing the hospital fully operational today, is proof that trusting my instincts was the right decision.

TDS: For young women who dream of leading in healthcare while building a family, what would you say about self-belief?

AK: While family is undoubtedly important, your own aspirations matter just as much. I always advise young women to keep chasing what their heart truly desires. Self-esteem and determination are the tools that help you achieve your dreams. You do not have to choose one over the other; you can absolutely balance a rewarding career and a fulfilling family life without sacrificing your identity.

TDS: How has your definition of success changed through the years as a woman, mother, and leader?

AK: Early in my career, I measured success by my title and how quickly I moved into higher positions. Over time, that definition has matured. Today, success means being able to spend quality time with my family while also being someone people turn to for hope. At the end of each day, if I feel I gave my hundred per cent, regardless of how difficult the day was, I feel successful. True success lies in being happy with yourself and ensuring your loved ones are content.

Interview conducted by Samia Chowdhury

