




MOTHERS in MEDICINE

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Motherhood nurturing success in Hematology



DR MAFRUHA AKTER
MBBS (Dhaka), FCPS (Hematology)
Associate Professor
Department of Hematology
Dhaka Medical College Hospital

Motherhood shaped my empathy and drive. Managing both roles helps me understand cases intensely, especially when treating children who look to us for hope."

communication with patients?
MA: Motherhood profoundly shaped my empathy. Managing both roles simultaneously allows me to understand a patient's situation more intensely. When I treat children, my own maternal experiences help me connect with them and their families on a deeper level. I do not just see a clinical case; I see a family seeking hope. This bond allows me to provide care that is both scientifically sound and emotionally supportive.

TDS: How do you manage the transition between the clinical environment and home?

MA: Compartmentalisation is my primary strategy. When I am at the hospital or the college, my focus is entirely on my patients, research, and students. Once I am home, I dedicate myself fully to my family. While the lines occasionally blur during emergencies, I strive to give each sphere the attention it deserves. My children have adapted well, and we have established a routine that protects our precious family time. My husband and parents have been my pillars, allowing me to excel in both roles.

TDS: As a woman leader, how are you working to improve healthcare standards?

In the precise field of hematology, Dr Mafruha Akter demonstrates that maternal instincts are a catalyst for clinical excellence. As an Associate Professor at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), she manages complex blood disorders while nurturing a fulfilling family life. Her journey, marked by international training and extensive research, highlights the resilience required to lead in medicine. By blending academic rigour with the empathy gained through motherhood, Dr Mafruha serves as a beacon for the next generation of female physicians.

The Daily Star (TDS): What initially drew you to hematology, and how has your mission evolved since becoming a mother?

Mafruha Akter (MA): My father inspired my medical aspirations, but I chose hematology because it uniquely combines medicine, patient interaction, and laboratory research. It is a fast-growing field essential for treating blood cancers. My career in this specialty ran parallel to my journey into motherhood. During my post-graduation and specialised bone marrow transplant training in the USA and Thailand, I had to leave my children behind. This demanding period taught me the true meaning of balance and resilience, shaping me into a more compassionate professional. I realised that the strength required to lead a department is often found in the sacrifices made at home.

TDS: How has motherhood changed your



MA: Beyond clinical work, I am an academician with over thirty publications in international journals. For Bangladesh, expanding research is vital to strengthening our healthcare infrastructure. I also aim to empower my female students. I want them to realise they do not have to sacrifice their professional dreams for their personal lives. With women now making up the vast majority of medical students, they are clearly the future of our nation's health.

TDS: What is the personal philosophy that keeps you motivated?

MA: I believe life is like sitting on a beach; the waves will constantly come and go. It will never be perfectly smooth, so we must find our own rhythm. My core philosophy is to approach every challenge with a cool head. Acceptance of life's unpredictability allows me to remain easy-going and focused.

Interview conducted by **Samia Chowdhury**

Acceptance keeps her practice steady



DR SHAHIDA ALAM
MBBS, FCPS (Radiotherapy)
Professor
Department of Radiation
Oncology
National Institute of Cancer
Research and Hospital

Motherhood taught me the patience needed to navigate clinical crises and the sympathy to treat every patient with the same care I give my children.

encouraged me to view my institution as a family, allowing me to look beyond mere professionalism. I treat my patients with the same protective sympathy I give my own children, fostering a bond that transcends the clinical environment. This maternal instinct provides a sense of comfort that is vital for those undergoing difficult cancer treatments.

TDS: How do you manage the pressure of such a demanding career?

SA: A smooth balance is not always achievable, and there are certainly moments of frustration or exhaustion. I believe acceptance is the key to mental health. You must make peace with the fact that you cannot be at the top of every game simultaneously. What matters is giving your absolute best effort in the moment. When the weight of treating critically ill patients feels heavy, I restore my peace through music, reading, and self-care. Without this inner stability, I cannot keep my surroundings functioning and happy.

TDS: What improvements are you bringing to cancer care at NICRH?

SA: As a professor, I focus on policy-making and empowering the next generation of trainees. At NICRH, we are working to align with global standards

Balancing the intricacies of radiation oncology with the demands of motherhood requires a unique form of resilience. Dr Shahida Alam, a Professor at the National Institute of Cancer Research & Hospital (NICRH), has spent her career refining this challenge. Initially drawn to the field for its promise of work-life stability, she soon discovered that the patience cultivated at home became her greatest clinical asset.

The Daily Star (TDS): What initially drew you to Radiation Oncology as your specialty?

Dr Shahida Alam (SA): I chose this subject early in my career primarily because it offered a more manageable schedule than other high-pressure specialisations. At the time, I sought a peaceful balance between a burgeoning medical career and a stable family life. However, this path became one of constant evolution. I have climbed the professional ladder while maintaining my home, upgrading myself every year as a physician, a mother, and a human being. Growth in oncology is frequent, and I have embraced every change with a commitment to both my patients and my children.

TDS: How has motherhood influenced your patient care?

SA: Raising children requires immense patience, a quality that helps me navigate complex clinical scenarios. The practice of managing daily tasks and taking critical decisions during household crises has proven invaluable in a hospital setting. Motherhood



by creating homogeneous treatment guidelines. These ensure all physicians follow a basic guidebook while personalising care through their own unique experience. My specific focus on breast cancer allows me to treat patients more profoundly through continuous, updated learning and research. We also arrange regular seminars and discussion sessions to cultivate a better, more efficient pathway for cancer care in Bangladesh.

TDS: What personal belief keeps you motivated?

SA: I wake up every morning knowing I have an unwavering purpose to serve now. I focus on taking one new step forward each day. I practice acceptance daily, as it lessens inner chaos and prevents despair.

Interview conducted by **Samia Chowdhury**