



MOTHERS in MEDICINE

The Daily Star
DHAKA SATURDAY
MAY 9, 2026
BAISHAKH 26, 1433 BS
S6

Fierce empathy powering medial frontiers

SAMIA CHOWDHURY

Mother's Day offers a meaningful moment to celebrate the women whose compassion, resilience, and quiet strength shape families, communities, and even the future of healthcare. Through the stories of these three doctors, we highlight how motherhood deepens empathy, strengthens purpose, and inspires excellence in demanding medical careers.



DR SADIA SHARMIN

MBBS, FCPS (Radiotherapy)
Associate Professor,
Department of Clinical
Oncology, Bangladesh
Medical University (BMU)

My FCPS journey remains my most profound experience. I failed my first attempt and was pregnant during my second. It was physically and mentally draining, and I had little hope of succeeding. However, I passed. That moment proved that the unique strength gained through motherhood can push a woman through the most difficult professional hurdles.

Resilience forged in Oncology

Dr Sadia Sharmin, exemplifies how medical precision and maternal instincts intertwine. For her, the path to becoming a specialist was inextricably linked with her transition into motherhood, with both roles demanding profound resilience.

The Daily Star (TDS): What initially inspired your career in oncology?

Dr Sadia Sharmin (SS): I originally intended to pursue paediatrics, but my professor convinced me that oncology was an emerging field with crucial work to be done. My journey as a specialist began alongside my journey into motherhood; I have grown professionally and personally in tandem ever since.

TDS: How has being a mother influenced the way you care for patients?

SS: It has deepened my empathy. In oncology, we face life-and-death situations daily. I no longer see just a medical case; I see a person with a family. When treating a child, I cannot help but think of my own children, which makes me more compassionate and driven to provide the best possible care.

TDS: Has motherhood changed the way you lead, teach, or mentor young doctors and students in your department?

SS: I mostly work with breast cancer and cervical cancer. I remember a young patient, around 25 weeks pregnant, with rectal cancer. While discussing treatment options the patient didn't prioritize her treatment, rather wanted her baby to be born healthy first. My experience of motherhood helped me understand her perspective. Also a sense of resilience has developed in me while raising my children, it has helped navigate multidimensional situations in my workplace too.

Radiating love through precision

Dr. Jannatul Ferdouse's entry into oncology was born from a father's heartfelt wish. Today, as a leading oncologist at Ahsania Mission Cancer and General Hospital, she balances the precision of radiotherapy with the nurturing soul of a mother.

The Daily Star (TDS): What initially drew you to the field of Oncology?

Dr Jannatul Ferdouse (JF): My father was diagnosed with stomach cancer during my internship. At that time, Bangladesh faced a severe shortage of oncologists. While undergoing chemotherapy, my father held my hand and said, "Ma, don't go into paediatrics; go into oncology. If you can help others, that will be a blessing for me." His words became my ultimate inspiration to pursue this high-precision field.

TDS: How has being a mother helped you navigate challenging patient cases?

JF: I once treated a 13-year-old girl with nasopharyngeal carcinoma. I navigated her moody phases with the softness and love I give my own children. After she recovered, she told a donor NGO, "If you see my doctor, half your illness is cured; she was like a mother." That reference eventually helped many other paediatric



DR JANNATUL FERDAUSE

MBBS, FCPS
(Radiotherapy), ESMO
certified
Associate Consultant
Radiation Oncology,
Ahsania Mission Cancer
and General Hospital
(AMCGH)

I remember, while my father was undergoing chemotherapy, he held my hand and said, "Ma, go into oncology. If you can help other cancer patients, that will be a blessing for me."

cancer patients receive rehabilitation and support.

TDS: How do female physicians uniquely contribute to the nation's health?

JF: Since over 50% of our population is female, having female oncologists is vital. Patients feel significantly more comfortable sharing symptoms of breast or cervical cancer with a woman. This comfort leads to earlier diagnoses and, ultimately, saves more lives.

TDS: What keeps you motivated on your heaviest days?

JF: Initially, losing patients was suffocating. However, the cordial relationships I develop with families keep me steady. The trust they place in us and their words of blessings are the sweet gestures that keep me moving forward.



PROFESSOR DR NAZNEEN MAHMOOD

MBBS, MD (Nephrology),
FRCP(Edin, UK),
CCD(BIRDEM)
Professor and Head of
Nephrology, Anwer Khan
Modern Medical College
and Hospital



Treat every patient like family. If you don't have that emotional connection, you cannot truly heal.

Elevating spirits in Nephrology

In the intricate field of nephrology, Professor Dr Nazneen Mahmood stands as a pioneer. As Professor and Head of Nephrology at Anwer Khan Modern Medical College, she reflects on a journey that began when female specialists were rare. Balancing rigorous postgraduate studies with raising two children, she mastered the art of multitasking.

The Daily Star (TDS): What exactly drew you to nephrology?

Prof Dr Nazneen Mahmood (NM): In 2002, kidney diseases were rising, yet female nephrologists were nearly non-existent. I saw a gap and a responsibility to serve. Pursuing a speciality with so few women required immense courage and clear vision.

TDS: How did you balance your postgraduate training with motherhood?

NM: It was incredibly challenging. I had two young children during my studies. I moved house to be near relatives for support and leave my children with help to manage shifts. This struggle taught me resilience and the necessity of a support system. Today, seeing my children excel as an engineer and another studying architecture, is my greatest professional reward.

TDS: How does motherhood influence your own clinical practice?

NM: Motherhood brings a level of patience and empathy that is essential in healthcare. I treat my patients like my own family. If you don't have that emotional connection, you cannot truly heal. I often help underprivileged patients beyond medical advice because a leader must care for the person, not just the specific illness.

TDS: Your final advice to young women going to navigate various stages of their life?

NM: Never give up. I tell my students to dream "up to the sky." Dedication will help you navigate the winds. Every morning I wake up with the mindset that I have a purpose to serve the whole wide world.