

Speech delivered by Selvi J Jayalalithaa, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu during the Launch of the Diamond Jubilee Year of the Cancer Institute, Chennai on 12.6.2013.

It is with great pleasure, that I take part in this landmark event, that rededicates the services of this colossal institution, in its ardent and assiduous mission to save people from the claws of the killer disease- Cancer. In the words of Sir William Osler, "Medicine is an art, not a trade; a calling, not a business; a calling in which your heart will be exercised equally with your head". The Cancer Institute has verily given life to this mission, it has indeed lived its mission in its 60 years of existence.

The Cancer Institute, founded by the illustrious icon Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy, had its humble beginning on July, 18th, 1954, in a small hut on the land donated by Shri.Puniakoti Mudaliar. Dr. Muthulakshmi hailed from an era when it was considered rebellion for girls to even think independently. True to her inner calling, she became the first woman doctor of India in 1912. Dr.Muthulakshmi along with two Europeans founded the Women's India Association (WIA) in 1918. She became the first Indian woman member of a Legislative Council in 1927. Her achievements as a legislator and social reformer have had a lasting impact on the lives of Indian womanhood.

To honour this great luminary, the Government of Tamil Nadu instituted the Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy Maternity Benefit scheme. After I assumed power for the 3rd time in 2011, I increased the financial assistance under this scheme to Rs.12,000 to be given to pregnant women from poor families as maternal assistance, in order to compensate the wage loss during pregnancy, to access nutritious food, and to avoid low birth weight babies. Improvement of facilities for institutional delivery and prevention of maternal and infant mortality was high on our list of priorities. On an average, 6 lakh women benefit from the scheme every year. During 2012-2013, 625.51 crore rupees have been disbursed. For the current financial year, 720 crore rupees have been allocated for this programme.

In 1949, Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy initiated the cancer relief fund of the WIA to set up a Specialty Cancer Hospital. Started in the 'Sevagram' type hut-cottages with 12 beds, this 9 acres hospice has grown in the face of adversity and is today a famed Institute in cancer treatment and research.

The Cancer Institute would not have achieved its laurels but for the dedication of Dr. V. Shanta to the cause of cancer. The name of Dr.V.Shanta is irrevocably intertwined and is a homogenous entity with the Cancer Institute. Her commitment to the cause is compelling and riveting. Dr.Shanta answered her inner calling to serve the sick and needy, foregoing a lucrative career. In 1954, when Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy founded the Cancer Institute with the Womens' Indian Association Cancer Relief Fund, Dr. Shanta had just then finished her Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) Course. In April 1955 she joined the fledgling Cancer Institute as its Resident Medical Officer. Dr. Shanta is now Chairperson of the Cancer Institute, Chennai. Her entire medical life of over 50 years has been dedicated to the mission of organising care of cancer patients, the study of the disease, its prevention and control and the generation of specialists and scientists in different aspects of Oncologic Sciences. She has played a pioneering role along with Dr Krishnamurthi in the development of the

Cancer Institute (WIA) to the level of a major comprehensive cancer centre of national and international stature.

The Cancer Institute was established at a time when diagnosis of Cancer was considered a certain death sentence. It was the determination of these visionaries that led to the metamorphosis of the untreatable killer scourge into a curable and manageable disease. A paradigm shift in the treatment of cancer, making it affordable, accessible and equitable was also possible, thanks to this fine institution.

I personally have great respect and regard for Dr. Shantha who, through her tireless, selfless service was and is, a prime mover in the field of cancer research and treatment. After I assumed office as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu for the 3rd time in 2011, my Government instituted the Avvaiyar award to honour women for their outstanding contribution in the fields of social reform, women's development, religious harmony, language, arts, tradition, culture, science, journalism and administration, among others. Dr. Shantha was rightfully chosen for the Avvaiyar Award for the year 2013. It was with great pleasure that I presented the award, on the occasion of International Women's Day, to Dr. Shantha. Besides, she is also the recipient of several other prestigious awards, the Padma Shri in 1986, and the Ramon Magsaysay Award for the year 2005, and the Padma Bhushan in 2006. Her astounding humility amazes us and her empowering persona, fills us with awe. She has raised the bar for all humanity, into a rare realm of selfless service, for a cause dear to her heart.

Living its mission of providing state-of-the-art treatment to people with all types of cancer, the Cancer Institute, equipped with world class medical facilities, houses 423 beds of which 297 are free, and treats over 1,25,000 patients annually. People from all over India and abroad are drawn by the healing ethos of this great institution. Over 66% of them are indigent, and are being treated free of charge. The Government of Tamil Nadu has been sanctioning a maintenance grant annually, to the Cancer Institute, in aid of its services to the poor. The maintenance grant is being given every year, starting with 9 lakh rupees from 1981-1982. Ever since 1992-1993, this grant was revised, with 10% increase annually. 2012-2013 saw the revision to 1.75 crore rupees. Currently, based on the request of Dr. Shantha, the maintenance grant for the Cancer Institute has been enhanced to 2.5 crore rupees, with an annual increase of 15%, in future.

The Institute has grown over the years into a comprehensive Cancer Centre, with a hospital, research division and educational facilities. The Institute has pioneered several concepts in cancer detection and therapy in India, such as conducting the country's first cancer survey, and setting up the first comprehensive pediatric cancer clinic, among others. We are all aware of the taboos and stigmas attached to cancer, and the Cancer Institute seeks to break free, and liberate patients, by providing them with an encouraging atmosphere of healing. One-third of the patients, who walk in here, leave the campus fully healed and well. Though this is indeed impressive, we must agree that there are miles in cancer research to be traversed, to reach the goal of 100% survival. The commitment to wipe this scourge away from the face of the earth, is echoed in the words of Dr. Shantha when she says that, the best day in her life would be the day, when the Cancer Institute is closed down, because of lack of cancer patients.

The hospital is doing the optimum it can, as expressed in the famous quote, "to cure sometimes, to relieve often and to comfort always". Such is the service rendered by the doctors, nurses and support staff of this hospital, and they deserve all appreciation, for their undaunted efforts in alleviating the suffering of the patients brought here for treatment.

I salute all the doctors, nurses and staff of this institution, who have been continuing this saga of healing, with extraordinary skill and ability. The pain, the fear, the suffering; the huge psychological impact cancer has, on its patients, on their friends and families, and the cost issues, still linger. Yet, laced through all of that, is a sense of accomplishment, of having artfully mounted a support system, in the face of cancer, something unthought of, a few decades ago. And this, is their achievement!

This place offers hope, and hope brings about healing. When the Japanese mend broken objects, they aggrandize the damage, by filling the cracks with gold. They believe that, when something has suffered damage, and has a history, it becomes more beautiful. This indeed is true, for the millions of cancer survivors, who have come out stronger, and more beautiful than before, and the Cancer Institute can justifiably be proud of its 60 year old heritage, of creating such wonderful people.

I have always considered the health of the people in Tamil Nadu, as my topmost priority. A healthy State, is a happy State. Productivity is high, and so is development, in a healthy State. I am happy to note here that Tamil Nadu stands, as one of the best performing States, in terms of implementing Reproductive and Child Health schemes, and has already achieved the National Rural Health Mission and Reproductive Child Health goals.

The achievements in macro indicators have been backed, by several pioneering landmark initiatives of my Government, with a view to ensuring Universal Health Care. The starting of the Tamil Nadu Medical Services Corporation in 1994; initiating maternal and child health initiatives, like 24 hour service at Primary Health Centres (PHCs); starting of one 30 bedded PHC in each block; providing adequate blood banks; creating facilities for night caesarean operations; opening neo natal stabilisation and intensive care units; and upgrading capacity for comprehensive obstetric and neonatal care; birth companion programme; maternal audits; and universal immunisation programme, are some among them. In addition to consolidating the initiatives and the programmes, which are already being successfully implemented, the State has also launched, the menstrual hygiene programme; and the modified, Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme. Our focus now, is to provide equal attention to public health, and prevention of diseases. 385 Mobile Medical Units have been upgraded as 'Hospitals on Wheels', at a cost of 40 crore rupees, with necessary additional manpower, laboratory facilities and other diagnostic equipment, to provide high quality medical care, with focus on Mother and Child Health Services; Communicable and Non-Communicable Diseases, covering all the remote villages and hamlets in Tamil Nadu.

It is my endeavour to make available, all procedures, techniques and medical skills, universally, to all the people of the State, irrespective of their socio-economic background.

Surgeries such as Liver Transplantation, Renal Transplantation, including post transplant procedure for immunosuppressant therapy; Bone marrow

transplantation; Cochlear implantation, and stem cell transplantation, costing more than 1.50 lakh rupees and ranging from 3 lakh rupees to 22 lakh rupees are beyond the means of a large segment of people. Hospitals approved under the Health Insurance Scheme cannot also be compelled to perform the surgeries within a cost of 1.50 lakh rupees. My Government has, therefore, announced the creation of a Corpus Fund of 10 crore rupees, to help the needy and poor people, especially children, who have to undergo such expensive surgeries. The extra cost of the surgery, exceeding the eligible amount of 1.50 lakh rupees per annum, will be met from this Corpus Fund. The entire cost of specialized surgery will be borne by the Insurance Company, up to 1.50 lakh rupees and the remaining amount will be met from the Corpus Fund. All such cases are cleared by an Expert Committee.

In Tamil Nadu, at any given point of time, there are several hundred patients admitted to various hospitals, with Blood cancer and Thalasaemia. Across the world, matching stem cells help over 60% of such patients to live normally. In the absence of an Indian stem cell bank, Indian patients, if lucky to find a match, have to import the same at a cost of over 25 lakh rupees. To ensure access to patients with Blood Cancer and Thalasaemia, my Government has sanctioned a first of its kind cord banking system, with a grant of 9 crore rupees to create a cord bank under Public Private Partnership. Under this scheme, 3000 cord blood donations would be collected and processed, and patients referred by the Government hospitals; Government employees and their dependents; and patients under the Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance scheme would be given the units free of charge. This will greatly benefit Blood cancer and Thalasaemia patients.

One important aspect that has hitherto been overlooked, is the provision of palliative care. Palliative care is a specialized area of healthcare, that focuses on relieving and preventing the suffering of patients. Caregivers are often neglected. It includes care of the patient and family; pain and symptom management; disease-modifying treatments; psychological, social and spiritual support, and bereavement support.

Home services inclusive of hydration, dressing, enema, ascites tapping, maggot removal, pressure sore dressing, management with homemade diapers, sponge bath, eye care, and oral care are provided by a team of personnel with a proper protocol for clinical treatment. This service to give a dignified existence prior to death, was hitherto missing from our system.

Realising the importance of introducing this approach to ameliorate the suffering of terminally ill cancer patients, a Pilot Project was initiated in February, 2012, in one block each, in the districts of Kancheepuram, Tiruchirapalli, Tiruvallur and Villupuram, covering 169 panchayats and a population of around 4.2 lakhs.

Both ambulant and bedridden patients who needed pain and palliative care, and 196 terminally ill patients were given this facility in Elapuram Block; 296 in Kancheepuram Block; 198 in Koliyanur Block; and 156 in Andhanallur Block, enabling them to get treated in their homes in the villages.

6000 rupees per patient was provided, for covering the cost of drugs, dressings, procedures, mobility for the team, minimal manpower of doctors, nurses, and field staff with specialist care wherever needed.

Considering the success of the pilot initiative, I have announced 15 crore rupees for this scheme to be extended to all the Districts of the State.

It was brought to my notice by Dr. Shantha that, the Cancer Institute has applied for upgradation to the status of a Centre of Excellence, and that the proposal was pending with the Union Government for approval. I have written to the Prime Minister of India, regarding the pending request of the Cancer Institute, considering the excellent service rendered for over 3 decades, even while functioning as an NGO; that its status should no more be that of a Tertiary Cancer Institute; but should be elevated to the status of a "Centre of Excellence – an Autonomous National Cancer Research Institute". We are awaiting the approval of the present Government of India. If the approval fails to materialize, I solemnly assure Dr. Shantha the next year there will be a friendly Government at the Centre that will immediately afford necessary approval for recognition of the Cancer Institute as a Centre of Excellence.

The Institute has several other firsts to its credit. These include the first Cobalt-60 Radiation therapy unit – It was the first such unit in Asia; the first Department of Nuclear Medical Oncology in 1956; Pediatric oncology in 1960; the first centre in India to be selected as a 'Regional Cancer Centre' for cancer treatment and research by the Government of India, 1975; introducing Blood Component Therapy in 1978; the first centre to introduce the concept of Oncology and establishing the Super Specialty College of Oncologic Sciences, recognized by the Madras University, and Dr. MGR Medical University in 1984; and the first in the country to start M.Phil Psycho-oncology in August 2011. I wish the firsts continue in the bejewelled tradition of this great institute.

The Cancer Institute lives up to its motto: "With humanity and in wisdom." It has journeyed through 60 years, fighting odds, battling vicissitudes and uncertainties, and continues to hold aloft its guiding mantra, "Service to All."

This is a place of miracles. The doctors and the staff have to tread softly, for they tread on hopes, fear and anxiety of families. They accomplish wonders with their professional skills. Every life saved from the jaws of death, is a living miracle; a reminder to us that every human being has a right to live, and succeed in his / her battle against whatever life threatening diseases threaten his/her existence. My Government is very conscious of such needs, and endeavours to ensure that state-of-the-art equipment and medical skills are made available to the needy.

"He who has health has hope; and he who has hope has everything", says an Arabic proverb. The Cancer Institute is a provider of both and I wish and envision the Institute and all the dedicated staff working here a happy cruise to success in their crusade against cancer.

On this memorable occasion, I have pleasure in announcing that the Government of Tamil Nadu will give a special grant of Five Crore rupees for the building of the Diamond Jubilee to be constructed by the Cancer Institute.

Thank you.
