The Taboo Called Cancer

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Some may feel like they would be a burden to others by sharing their stories, while many others feel ashamed.
I am the latter, as I surprisingly didn’t want to share about my illness to anyone except for close friends, and family members. Even relatives discouraged me from telling other people what I had.

Abandonment
I kept asking myself why I felt ashamed of having cancer, and came to the realization that I was afraid people would see me differently, or even weak for having cancer.

However, I’ve heard many other stories that are far worse than my own. A friend
working at a hospice recently disclosed to me that there were a number of cases where family members had isolated the cancer patient upon diagnosis as they thought the patient was a bearer of bad luck (‘sui’ in Chinese).

One example of this abandonment is a breast cancer patient in another Malaysian state. The unfortunate lady had become too weak to care for her own hygiene, and
she needed the nurse from the hospice care to bath her, wash her hair and treat

her wounds. Her own brother would only bring food and leave it at the front door!

Support is needed
When I heard this story, I was shocked and very saddened that these type of taboos and myths still exist in this day and age.

It’s never easy to be diagnosed with cancer and trying to recover from it, but the chances of overcoming the disease becomes so much lower if there is no support from anyone, especially family members. As written previously, emotional support is one of the most important forms of support that needs to be given to a patient so that he/she does not fall into depression. After realizing that there was no basis for perceiving myself as weak for having cancer, I started understanding more about cancer medically, and how to recover from it. Plus, I gained the strength from encouraging people around me to share my story, and I did.

Let’s be open about cancer
The reason why I wanted to share my story was to tell people that “cancer” is not something to be afraid of. There are various treatments available and chances of recovery are greater if the cancer is detected early.

On top of that, I wanted to debunk the taboo that cancer is a weakness and dispel the attitude that “you did something bad in your life if you have cancer’’. I don’t see why Asians can’t talk openly about it as westerners do. In western countries, the movement, support groups, and research is so advanced because people are willing to talk about it, and even bring cancer awareness to a higher level. Let’s get rid of the taboos surrounding cancer. Let’s encourage anyone we know who has cancer to share their story with no fear.

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