PNB PERSPECTIVES

A Story of Strength

Two voices on finding hope, healing and courage through cancer

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PNB

A Story of Strength

Every October, Pinktober reminds us that a single diagnosis touches far more lives than we may realise. Behind the awareness campaigns are real people: those who face the diagnosis, and those who stand beside them. This year, Women & Inclusivity Network (W.I.N.) of PNB sat down with two colleagues sharing their stories, one as a survivor and one as a caregiver.

Amirah: “I was in denial”

For Amirah Alam, Manager, Economics in PNB, her journey began years before her diagnosis. During a self-check, she found a lump, but kept putting off getting it examined. “I was in denial,” she recalls.

It took a Pinktober screening campaign in 2019 for her to finally act. The lump was non-cancerous. But the story was far from over.

In 2020, while pregnant, a nurse advised her to have it checked again. This time, it had become pre-cancerous. She underwent surgery during her pregnancy, then waited to deliver her daughter. In 2022, the lump returned, leading to a second surgery and radiotherapy. In 2024, it came back once more, and this time it was cancerous.

What followed was a demanding year of multiple surgeries, including two mastectomies, and chemotherapy. “It was both physically and emotionally demanding,” she says.



Amirah during one of her hospital stays, where she underwent multiple surgeries and chemotherapy.

What kept her grounded was the people around her. Her husband was her biggest pillar of strength, even cleaning and dressing her wounds after surgery. Colleagues visited her in hospital, and family and friends kept coming to the house to cheer her up. “Their love and care helped me get through the pain and made even the hardest days bearable.”

Going from a busy working life to days at home and in hospital was a big adjustment. “I actually missed working, missed the routine, the interactions and my colleagues,” she admits. “There were moments when I wondered whether I would ever get my normal life back.” Time with her daughter gave her a reason to keep going, and she learned to take things one day at a time and lean on others instead of carrying everything alone.



Amirah’s colleagues and superiors visiting her while she was in the hospital undergoing treatment.

The support from PNB also made a difference. She was given paid leave throughout her treatment, and her medical expenses were fully covered, allowing her to focus entirely on recovery.

“My superiors and bosses were incredibly supportive. They always checked in on me and encouraged me to focus fully on my treatment.”

After months, Amirah finally returned to work. “I’m truly grateful to be part of #teamPNB, an organisation that stood by me when I needed it most.”



Amirah with her daughter during one of her family's hospital visits.

Looking back, she wished she had acted sooner.

"Do your self-checks regularly, and if you notice anything unusual, get it checked straight away. Do not wait, and do not assume it will go away on its own."

For her, Pinktober is personal, because a screening campaign first got her checked. "My hope is that more people become aware of their health and get the treatment they deserve, as early as possible."



Throughout her journey, Amirah believed in keeping a positive mindset to get through the hardest days.

Noor Musyahidah: "Not again"

For Noor Musyahidah Mohd Zawawi, Manager, Creative Solutions in PNB, cancer was not new to her family. "I have two cancer warriors in my family, my late mum and my youngest sister," she says. Their mother passed away from cancer in 2016, leaving a deep emotional impact. In 2021, her youngest sister was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Fondly known as Musya, she remembers exactly where she was when the news came: out road cycling with her family when the call came. "My first thought was, '*Allahuakbar*, not again.' All the fear and memories came rushing back. We cycled home in tears, not knowing what to expect."

For Musya, caregiving was never a burden, but a duty she embraced with an open heart.

"Personally, I don't really see it as a challenge, but more of an *amanah* from Allah, which comes with responsibilities." With both parents passed away, the four sisters have only each other to rely on, and balancing their own lives with the wish to be by her side throughout the process. "We had to learn how to manage our own emotions while being strong for one another," she said.



Musya (right) and her sister (left) now enjoy staying active together, with a renewed focus on health and strength.

Musya accompanied her sister to specialist appointments, stayed by her side during hospital visits and offered emotional support. “I wanted to ensure she felt supported, reassured and knew that she was never alone.”

The experience taught her not to take breast cancer lightly. “It can develop without obvious symptoms, and by the time it is diagnosed, it may already be at an advanced stage,” she said. “What may seem minor could be an early indication of something serious. It is always better to get checked rather than wait until it is too late.”

It also changed how she supports others. “One thing I’ve learned is the importance of patience and understanding, especially when they are going through emotional ups and downs,” she recounted. “Try to stay positive and bring them along with that positivity. Sometimes, just being present can make a big difference.”



Musya (left) and her sister (right) during a recent hike together to Lata Kinjang, Perak.

She believes support does not have to be grand. “Even a simple message, or just checking in can mean so much. When you are surrounded by people who genuinely care, it gives you that extra strength to keep going.”



Musya (right) with her sister during a family trip travelling to Yunnan, China.

What kept her sister going, Musya believes, was love. “Knowing that she is loved and never alone gave her the strength to keep going.” The experience has also changed her. “I have learned to be more grateful for the health and time that Allah has given us. Sometimes, just being present for each other means so much more.”

To fellow caregivers, she shared a verse from Surah Al-Insyirah:

“*Fa inna ma’al ‘usri yusra, inna ma’al ‘usri yusra*”, which translates to, “For indeed, with hardship comes ease. Indeed, with hardship comes ease.” “Allah said it twice,” she noted.

It is a reminder that in every test, there is ease alongside it. “Take things one day at a time. Be there for your loved ones, be positive, but don’t forget to take care of yourself too. And most importantly, never lose faith in Allah’s plans.”

Her Pinktober message is simple: “Don’t wait until something feels wrong. Make time for regular health checks, understand your own body, and go for cancer screening when recommended.”

“Taking care of ourselves is also one way of taking care of the people we love,” she concluded.

You are not alone: where to find support

Both Amirah and Musya point to the same thing: a strong support system made the difference.

For those who want to connect with others who have walked a similar path, whether as a survivor or a caregiver, several organisations in Malaysia are ready to help.

Breast Cancer Welfare Association Malaysia (BCWA)

Founded in 1986 to provide peer support for patients and survivors, BCWA offers psychosocial support, education and care. Support also extends to caregivers, not only survivors.

National Cancer Society of Malaysia (NCSM)

NCSM offers peer support groups, wellness classes, a cancer information hotline, and breast prosthesis and wig fittings.

Breast Cancer Foundation (BCF)

Formerly Pride Foundation, BCF runs support groups and provides health navigators to assist patients throughout their treatment.

Two journeys, one message

Their stories are different, but they highlight the same truth: early action matters, and no one should face cancer alone.

Whether through a self-check, a screening campaign, a colleague's visit or a quiet presence at someone's side, hope grows where people show up for one another.

Amirah's story shows what can happen when a warning sign is acknowledged sooner rather than later. Musya's shows the quiet strength of those who stay beside a loved one through the hardest moments.

One learned to lean on others, the other learned that simply being present can mean the world. Both found that taking things one day at a time was enough.

This Pinktober, let their experiences be a gentle nudge: schedule that health check, learn what is normal for your body, and speak up when something feels different. And if someone around you is going through a difficult time, a simple message or a visit can go a long way. Taking care of ourselves, and of one another, is how we keep hope alive.



Amirah (left) and Musya (right) hope their stories will inspire others to prioritise their health and lend support to those around them.