




WE CARE
— cancer awareness

A Fight Against Cancer

Tata Memorial Centre (TMC) and National Cancer Grid (NCG) in association with Navya are instrumental in providing evidence based expert treatment solutions for complex medical conditions

Words // **Gitika Srivastava**



TMC NCG Navya has a simple goal of reaching out to each and every cancer patient and empowering them with information and clarity regarding their medical decisions. To accomplish this goal, TMC NCG Navya has developed a set-up that uses machine learning, and collaborated with Tata Memorial Centre and other expert cancer centres which are part of the National Cancer Grid (NCG) in order to create an online service that anyone in the world can contact. The service empowers ailing patients with the knowledge of the best possible treatment for their specific condition.

COMING TOGETHER

When the idea came to us to use data and technology to create a platform that would empower cancer patients, we reached out to the top oncologists in the world. During this time, we received tremendous support from TMC's leadership as our vision aligned with their goals of providing standardised, evidence-based care across the country in a scalable manner. Over a course of time, TMC and Navya worked together to develop the TMC NCG Navya Online Expert Opinion Service which would

democratise and widen the common person's access to world-class oncology expertise, available at TMC. The online service ensures that patients receive an expert opinion irrespective of their location and then continue their treatment at a hospital of their choice. We feel humbled to be working with the largest network of cancer centres in the world, such as AIIMS, Kidwai, Adyar Cancer Institute, etc. As a result of this online service, patients and their families can seek expert advice on the right diagnosis and treatment plan from experts across the country. Furthermore, the patients also have access to a list of cancer treatment centres so they can choose the one closest to them.

THE PROCESS

Given the complexities of cancer treatment where several reports need to be examined in detail, we believe that telemedicine solutions are suboptimal. In the best tertiary care centres (like TMC), trained clinical professionals spend significant time going through cases including patient history and reports before they approach the expert, whose time is precious. These experts then utilise their significant wisdom to provide the best treatment plan in accordance



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with international guidelines and the experience gained from the hundreds of cases they see every week.

TMC NCG Navya looks to replicate this model in an efficient manner where a patient advocate reaches out to the patient and understands the complete medical history followed by an analysis by a trained clinical staff who extracts relevant information from medical reports and presents the case for further evaluation by an expert. The expert then looks at the pertinent information and takes a decision on the line of treatment. This procedure

typically takes around 1-3 days. The TMC NCG Navya system is used to determine the most applicable evidence based treatment options.

IMPORTANCE OF TIME

Many cancers are curable if diagnosed early and treated appropriately. The first round of medical care is a cancer patient's best chance and can be the difference between the best possible outcome and a failed treatment. The treatment is life changing both clinically as well as financially. For this reason, everyone who is faced with a treatment decision should look to get their

case opined by an impartial expert before continuing the treatment locally. This can either be done during the initial cancer diagnosis stage, before a treatment path has been fixed or after the local physician has given a treatment path and the patient would still like a second opinion for peace of mind. Finally, in advanced or complex cases, there is limited specialised expertise available to determine the best path forward. This is the most common scenario in which many patients reach out to TMC NCG Navya, to know what can be done for the patient given certain difficult circumstances.

GET ANSWERS IN A DAY

When confronted with a critical medical decision, there is often anxiety where patients want to know the best course of action quickly. Balancing the need to act swiftly while ensuring that the decision is made with all relevant expert inputs is when TMC NCG Navya's Online Expert Opinion Service becomes a powerful ally.

We understand the anxiety in knowing what to do as quickly as possible, and hence have strived to ensure that we facilitate the opinion from the experts within 24 hours of getting all necessary medical reports.

SUCCESS STORY

Since June 2015, when this service was launched, we have had over 24,000 people from 68 countries reach out to us. What is most heartening is when someone whom we have empowered with an expert opinion goes on to follow that treatment plan and is better for that treatment. We have had numerous cases where, based on the expert opinion, a potentially suboptimal treatment was changed that led to improved outcomes. There have also been many cases when family members reached out to us for patients under their care and the expert recommended that the best course of action was supportive or

palliative care. In such cases, any potential benefit of therapy would be far outweighed by its toxicity or side effects in that particular case. Often these would be cases where false hopes or expensive treatments are weighed against quality of life and patient preference. We are able to provide objective information and guide the patient forward with empathy and care on what is the best path or best step to take at this time. When we have patients who have successfully completed prior therapies and are back for the next course of action, heading on a path to recovery, that is the happiest outcome that we look out for.

BACKGROUND

It all started in 2007, when one of my closest family members was diagnosed with the life threatening disease. My family quickly rounded up opinions from several oncologists in the world. We used email, phone, in-person meetings, favours from friends and family and even extended family and coworkers. We sat through hours of Internet research and finally settled on medical evidence and results of randomised clinical trials published Pubmed/MEDLINE. This was a nerve wracking and confusing time for us. The only approach to get through this ordeal was to try and get the best information, the best treatment option, the best recommendation by the best doctors, and leave the rest on God or fate. That is how TMC NCG Navya was conceived. It seeks to deliver Clarity in Complexity by empowering the patients and their family with credible information around the best possible treatment available. This is the crux of TMC NCG Navya. ✿

Gitika Srivastava is the Founder of the TMC NCG Navya Service



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