

The Journey of Iza:

Overcoming Breast Cancer

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Breast cancer is the most common type of cancer among Malaysian women in all ethnic groups. It's found that 1 in 20 Malaysian women are affected by breast cancer and most women views breast cancer as a death sentence.

However, Faiza Palil, a 46-year-old woman from Yong Peng, Johor stayed strong and kept a positive mind as she fought Stage II breast cancer while raising and supporting her two daughters.

Mrs. Faiza or Iza which she is affectionately called by her loved ones was like every married woman out in the world. She was happily married to her husband for almost 20 years and blessed with two beautiful daughters who are currently studying at UITM Segamat, Johor. She works as a nurse at Johor Health Department (JKNJ) which is why health plays an important role in her life and her family's.

When Iza found out she was diagnosed with Stage II breast cancer back in April 2009, her life changed unexpectedly.



[Picture of Iza]

"While I was washing my body and running self-breast examination as usual, I found that there was a lump on the upper right side." she said, her eyes flashed with memories while she told her story.

"I did a Mammogram and Ultrasonography (USG) test at Puteri Specialist Hospital, Johor Bharu. At the time, I was 39 years old. After about four days, the results were out and the doctor told me I was confirmed to be diagnosed with Stage II breast cancer."

Usually, people would express their anger or resentment when tragedy befalls upon them. While it does sadden her when she received the news, she viewed her circumstances in a positive light.

"I'm at peace on this judgment from God because for me in a thousand, maybe one person who is tested. I was very positive because to me, there are people out there who are dealing with more difficult things but they stayed steadfast. Why do I, as a paramedic can't handle the truth of what will happen?"



When she told her family about the breast cancer, she was thankful that her daughters understood of her situation.

“My sister and I tried to ask them about what happen (about the news); my parents explained to us softly and we accepted (the news) peacefully.” Her youngest daughter, Faraheen, said.

What surprised Iza the most was the fact that her beloved husband was unable to accept the news as he was a kidney recipient and he was deeply worried for her.

“We both cried but my strength and spirit was more than my late husband and he cried more badly than I did similar to how the late P. Ramlee had lost his wife (in the movies).” Iza said, while smiling gently at the memory.

Iza had gone through a total mastectomy in which she completely removes her entire right breast and also undergone chemotherapy and radiotherapy. She claimed that chemotherapy can be frightening for some people but she did not fear nor worry because she viewed it as a way for her to get better.

Even though she had to suffer greatly during both of her therapies, she was determined to prove to everyone that a cancer patient can live normally without thinking of any deficiency in her. She was also grateful to have an employer and colleagues who understood her circumstances.

When it seemed that everything was getting better, Iza was about to receive news that may truly shatters her; which is the death of her beloved husband.

31st May 2009 was the most heartbreaking day for Iza and her family.

Her husband, Mohd Fadzilullah, the main pillar of support throughout her marriage, had passed away on Sunday morning. At the time, Iza was already admitted in the ward at Sultan Ismail Hospital since Friday and was put into isolation due to her condition and treatment.

Since her vulnerable condition does not allow any contact from the outside world, she only knew from her mother that her husband was admitted into the same hospital as hers the day after and that he was sick. She didn’t know the extent of his illness.

It was her closest sister-in-law who came to take Iza back home to see her husband. However, after the sister-in-law failed countless times to persuade her, Iza insisted that she wanted to finish her treatment first so that she would be able to take care of her husband afterwards. In the end, her sister-in-law had finally given in and told her softly that her husband had passed away.



“It was then when my world had gotten dark for a moment and I screamed with all my might. I thought the world had become so empty without him. But when I got home and saw the face of my late husband, it was what gave me the strength to continue to educate my children and I promised to take care of my children till the end of time.”

After the death of her beloved husband, Iza continued her treatment at Hospital Sultan Ismail. She was truly grateful of the support given by her late husband’s family for accepting her into their family and letting her stay at her mother-in-law’s house for a while.

She also took a leave of absence for two years from work which was permitted as her work place allows a cancer patient to take a leave of absence for that amount of time. She took her time off from work as an opportunity to do various activities to increase her income and support her family.

Fortunately working as a nurse provided her with a fixed salary and her late husband had also left her with a small pension for her to continue living her life with both of her daughters. She was proud of how her daughters were her pillar of strength when times were tough.

"If I cry, they would be upset with me, because for them it would remind them of their late father. If I cried because my disease, they also said that I was a weak mother, so I always tell my children that I was a strong woman."

"I want to show the public that a cancer patients and single mothers can also teach a child to be successful and the children can succeed in both worlds; now and hereafter." Iza smiled.

After surviving the first breast cancer, Iza found out that she was diagnosed again with breast cancer back in 2014. This time, it was on her lower left side of her breast. She went through total mastectomy for the second time and now she is a breast cancer patient who had bilateral mastectomy surgery and is still undergoing treatments.

Nevertheless, this does not stop her from inspiring people with her story at motivation campaigns and donation events held at her workplace. Her family and relatives is really proud of what Iza had achieved today and agreed that Iza had grown stronger from this whole experience.

One of them, being the closest person to Iza, Jamilah was most proud of Iza's achievements as she had been there almost every step of the way during this long and difficult journey. However, she was sad for Iza because her weak condition had not allowed her to go to her eldest daughter convocation recently in May 2015.

"Iza had been telling me that if she had longer life, she wanted to go to her daughters' convocation. But when the time came, she was put into isolation and she cannot go." Jamilah said sadly as she remembered Iza asking her to go on her behalf which she went reluctantly.

Jamilah and Iza's youngest daughter took lots of pictures and videos on that day in hope of easing her sadness and to

fulfill their promised to Iza.

Today, Iza has inspired many people with her story and she has a special advice for women out in the world.

"If you experience something different or abnormal in yourself, especially around the breasts, I suggest that you immediately consult a doctor. I hope we do not have the feeling of shy nor fear and worry as not all lumps are cancer."

Filled with painful and bitter-sweet moments, Iza's journey has clearly shown that women should not perceive breast cancer negatively. Instead, embrace it and fight to live for the sake of themselves and their loved ones.



[Picture of Iza and her two daughters]