

Objectives

- **ACTREC of TMC** is an autonomous institution under the central government and is involved in patient care, research, and education in cancer with a mandate to provide subsidised care to 60% of its patients from the economically weaker sections of society.
- Being a premier institution for cancer care, patients come to ACTREC from all over the country and require to stay in Mumbai for sometimes a prolonged period for their treatment. Out of 44941 total registered patients in 2022, 38746 (86.2%) were outstation patients not having residential support in the city.
- ACTREC had a patient hostel for 80 patients with a self-cooking facility. As the centre was on the cusp of major expansion from 130 to 900 beds, a new hostel with 260 rooms, 40 dormitory beds, and a cafeteria for dining was built with philanthropic support. On shifting to the new hostel, patients were required to change from self-cooking to enrolling in centre-run mess to meet their dietary needs.
- Though the diets were priced at cost, feedback from the hostel inmates within a month has made it evident to the management that patients (with one caregiver) were finding it difficult to financially sustain the mess bill, especially for a prolonged stay.
- As infrastructure constraints did not permit going back to the self-cooking mode, management was faced with the challenge of how to make the patient's diet much more affordable or free without any compromise on quality or nutritional requirements.
- The management decided to take up the challenge to implement a free food program for hostel inmates with sufficient fundraising for long-term sustenance.

Methods

Tight cost control:

- Standardised 4 meals a day for each patient with one caregiver through a coupon system
- Costing and budget fixing for different types of diets (regular and special diets)
- Inhouse kitchen with quality raw materials purchased through rate contracts and minimising wastage.

Fundraising strategies

- Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR) funding through corporate
- Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs) support and individual / business family philanthropy
- Meal sponsorship for special occasions/ birthdays/ remembrance
- Publicity through website/ appeal/ staff sponsorship

Result

	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Total
Meal days (Patients & caregivers)	2916	4566	5510	5930	5928	6500	31350
Beneficiaries (Patients & caregivers)	370	354	334	314	286	348	2004

- The median stay of the patients in the hostel was 5 days (IQR -2-16). The monthly expenditure calculated for providing all 4 meals of the day to patients with one caregiver was averaged at Rs. 7.74 lakhs (US\$ 9506)/ month.

Image



Conclusion

- **Change of systems can lead to unanticipated challenges. Management has to re-strategise and come up with timely sustainable solutions**
- **Free food schemes for economically deprived patients led to zero food expenditure, a better-balanced diet, and more time and attention for the caregiver to attend to patient needs**
- **Future challenges include continuity of funding, rising costs, and corpus creation**

References

Independent in-house study

Key words

Free food, economically weak, sustainability, funding