

# My Why: Saving Breasts, Saving Lives

A heartfelt reflection on purpose, awareness, and saving lives through early detection and compassionate breast cancer care

**E**very October, the world turns pink to reaffirm our commitment to the fight against breast cancer. This year, the theme “My Why” invites each of us to reflect on our motivation—why we choose to speak up, to act, and to care.

As a breast cancer surgeon, my why stems from the stories I witness every day—stories of courage, resilience, and hope. Each patient reminds me that early detection not only saves lives but also preserves a woman's identity, confidence, and sense of self.

## The Growing Burden in India

Breast cancer has now become the most common cancer among Indian women, surpassing cervical cancer. According to the National Cancer Registry, nearly one in 28 women is likely to develop breast cancer during her lifetime.

Yet, what's more alarming is when we find it. Nearly 60% of Indian women are diagnosed in advanced stages, often when the disease has already spread.

*“I thought it was just a milk lump,” said a 42-year-old mother of two who ignored a lump for months. By the time she walked into the hospital, the disease had advanced. Her story isn't unique—it's painfully common.*

## Early Detection: The Game Changer

The good news? Breast cancer is highly curable when detected early. Awareness, not technology, remains our most powerful tool.

Being “breast aware” simply means knowing what's normal for you and noticing any changes—be it a lump, skin dimpling, nipple discharge, or a change in shape. Women over 40

should undergo regular mammography, and those with a family history or genetic risk should start even earlier.

## Understanding the Risks

While genetics and age play a role, lifestyle is an equally important factor. Urban lifestyles marked by late childbirth, obesity, stress, and reduced breastfeeding have added to the risk. Prevention is still the best medicine.

## Oncoplastic Surgery: Where Medicine Meets Art

For decades, the mention of breast cancer carried the shadow of mastectomy. Women often feared losing not just a breast, but a part of their identity.

Today, we can remove the tumour completely while reshaping or reconstructing the breast, often in the same operation. The goal is simple: cure without compromise.

At our institute, we've seen how this approach restores not just the body but also confidence. Patients often say, *“I never imagined I could look normal again.”*

## Bridging the Gap: Government and Grassroots Action

The government's initiatives under the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS) have expanded screening at the primary health level. However, greater emphasis on breast health education and training healthcare workers in early detection is vital.

Several NGOs and advocacy groups are complementing these efforts by conducting awareness



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drives, screening camps, and survivorship support programs. Their contribution, especially in rural India, has been instrumental in reaching women who would otherwise remain undiagnosed until late stages.

## My Why

People often ask me what keeps me motivated after years in this field. My answer is simple: every breast saved is a life restored.

My why is the smile of a woman walking out of surgery, knowing she's cancer-free and still herself. My why is the mother who tells her daughter, *“Get checked early—I did, and it saved my life.”*

As we mark Breast Cancer Awareness Month 2025, let's move beyond pink ribbons and hashtags. Let's start real conversations. Let's ensure no woman delays care out of fear or ignorance.

Because when detected early, breast cancer is not just treatable—it's curable. Be breast aware. Be proactive. That's my why.

## About the Author

*Dr Vishvak Chanthar is a leading oncoplastic and breast cancer surgeon with extensive expertise in breast conservation and reconstructive surgery. As the Chief of Breast Onco-Surgery at RGCIIRC, he is deeply involved in clinical care, resident training, and research focused on improving oncological and aesthetic outcomes for women with breast cancer.*