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**DR.
BHAWNA
SIROHI**
MEDICAL DIRECTOR
AT BALCO MEDICAL
CENTRE (BMC)

**DR.
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SIROHI**

**REDEFINING CANCER
CARE FOR UNDERSERVED
INDIA**

*Making affordable, accessible,
and compassionate treatment a
reality for the country's most
vulnerable populations.*

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Dr. Bhawna Sirohi

Redefining Cancer Care for Underserved India

Making affordable, accessible, and compassionate treatment a reality for the country's most vulnerable populations.

Shweta Singh | The CEO Magazine

The healthcare system in India is no stranger to complexity, but when it comes to oncology, the challenges reach an entirely different level. The gaps are deeper, the stakes higher, and the disparities far more personal. From delayed diagnoses to prohibitively expensive treatments, the burden of cancer in India falls most heavily on those with limited access to resources. It's clear that what India really needs isn't just more hospitals or machines but leaders that understand systems, scale, and the human side of care.

Enter Dr. Bhawna Sirohi, a senior consultant specialising in breast and gastrointestinal cancers. With years of experience in oncology across the globe and a genuine commitment to tackling India's unique health challenges, she's driving a treatment approach built on three simple but powerful principles: accessibility, affordability, and empathy.

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The Courage to Dream Differently

Dr. Bhawna Sirohi didn't grow up dreaming of medical school. Raised in a traditional household where most girls were expected to marry by the age of 18 and settle into domestic life, she too was taught to cook, bake, sew, knit and prepare for marriage. But her story took a different turn, thanks in part to her father, who saw something more for her.

Her father was an Indian Army officer whose postings moved the family every other year across the country. Her childhood, spent across Cochin, Ranikhet, Kolkata and other army towns, was filled with learning, movement, and books. An avid reader, Dr. Sirohi sometimes finished two novels in a day. One of those, Fever by Robin Cook, sparked something unexpected. The story of a doctor fighting to save his daughter from leukaemia stayed with her. It made her think differently about what she wanted to do.

“THAT’S WHEN I
KNEW I WANTED
TO BE A CANCER
SPECIALIST.”
-DR. SIROHI

Convincing her family that she wanted to pursue medicine instead of marriage wasn't easy, but it was her first act of rebellion. The first girl in her family to take that path, she set a precedent not just for herself but for every young woman who would come after her.

Building a Foundation in Oncology

After completing her undergraduate and postgraduate studies at LLRM Medical College in Meerut, Dr. Bhawna Sirohi began her oncology career at Tata Memorial Hospital in Mumbai, one of India's leading cancer centres. Over four years she spent there, Tata provided her with early exposure to a high volume of complex cases and the realities of delivering cancer treatment in a resource-constrained environment.

In 1998, she moved to the UK for further training, starting at the Royal Marsden Hospital and later working with other leading institutions across the country. The transition came with its own set of challenges, but the structured academic environment, complete with clinical protocols,

communication training, and research opportunities, brought with it a new perspective on care standards. Over the years, she trained as a medical oncologist, took on senior consultant roles, worked with global teams, and participated in international clinical trials. This international experience laid the groundwork for a career that would eventually span both continents and healthcare systems.

Bridging Global Research and Indian Healthcare

In 2018, Dr. Bhawna Sirohi became the first Indian to be elected President of the Oncology Section of the Royal Society of Medicine in London. She also served as a training director in Kenya, mentoring oncologists working in under-resourced hospitals through a collaboration with the Royal College of Physicians. Her experience in global oncology deepened her understanding of the disparities and strengthened her determination to make a difference in India.

Dr. Sirohi is also the first and only Indian co-researcher on a team awarded the prestigious Cancer Grand Challenges grant, funded by Cancer Research UK and the U.S. National Cancer Institute.

After years of gaining global experience, Dr. Sirohi chose to return to India with a clear focus: improving access and affordability of treatment in underserved regions. She currently serves as the Medical Director at Balco Medical Centre (BMC) in Raipur, Chhattisgarh. Her journey from a small, conservative Indian town to global leadership in cancer treatment exemplifies courage, conviction, and compassionate leadership.

BMC's Mission: Access, Innovation, and Empathy

Balco Medical Centre (BMC) is a not-for-profit, NABH-accredited, 170-bed cancer hospital under the Vedanta Medical Research Foundation. Situated in Naya Raipur, Chhattisgarh, BMC provides advanced oncology treatment to patients from rural and semi-urban areas, many of whom previously had to travel long distances for care.

Under Dr. Bhawna Sirohi's leadership, BMC is guided by a clear mission: to deliver evidence-based, affordable, ethical, and accessible treatment to all. The hospital focuses on:

- Cost-effective treatment through research-backed de-escalation protocols.
- Community outreach, cancer screening, and HPV vaccination in underserved areas.
- Survivorship support, including yoga, nutrition, and mental health care.
- Digital transformation, including AI-based diagnostics and teleoncology.
- End-of-life care, encouraging a shift away from expensive, futile ICU admissions.



“Healthcare leadership is not just about managing teams or departments,” Dr. Sirohi says. “It’s about shaping a culture of empathy, efficiency, and equity.”

Ensuring Care for All

Dr. Bhawna Sirohi's early work in preventive and social medicine during medical school gave her valuable insights into community health challenges. She led birth control awareness campaigns and collaborated with ASHA and Anganwadi workers to conduct breast and cervical cancer screenings across villages in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Karnataka, and Haryana.

“It was hard to get women to come forward even for a basic breast exam,” she recalls. “So I collaborated with village elders, local gurus, and even celebrities to build trust.” This grassroots approach continues at BMC, where mobile mammography vans now screen women in tribal and rural districts. Patients diagnosed with cancer are provided with free treatment pathways, ensuring early care and support.

Dr. Sirohi is also committed to breaking down clinical and systemic silos. She serves on national bodies such as the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the National Cancer Grid, contributing to the development of cancer treatment guidelines and advancing research that benefits patients across India. However, she emphasises that guidelines alone are not enough. “In India, we often lack peer review outside

of a few institutions. We need implementation with transparency and accountability.” To bridge gaps in access, BMC partners with NGOs, government schemes, and corporate donors to ensure that no patient is denied treatment due to financial constraints.

Leading in Difficult Times

For Dr. Bhawna Sirohi, some of the toughest challenges come when patients arrive too late for treatment, held back by distance, lack of awareness, or limited resources. In response, she has championed palliative and end-of-life care models, inspired by the UK's hospital systems to bring dignity and comfort to patients in their final stages.

Her leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic was equally impactful. She ensured continuity of treatment through telemedicine, home-based palliative kits, and distanced chemotherapy regimens which minimised patient exposure while maintaining the continuity of critical treatment. These innovations not only safeguarded vulnerable patients but also redefined how oncology services can adapt in times of crisis.

Values That Drive Success

At the heart of Dr. Bhawna Sirohi's leadership is a clear threefold ethic: compassion, clinical excellence, and cost-effectiveness. “I make decisions by asking, ‘What would I want if this were my sister or mother?’ That question never fails me,”

SALUTING THE BATONBEARERS OF
NATION'S HEALTH!

Dr. Bhawna Sirohi



she says. She also promotes a flat hierarchy at BMC, encouraging everyone, from nurses to junior doctors, to share their concerns and ideas openly. For Dr. Sirohi, success is measured not by awards but by real impact. "When a woman from a tribal village completes her treatment and walks out with dignity, that is success." Alongside this patient-focused approach, she takes pride in shaping healthcare policy, guiding national committees, and contributing to cutting-edge research. Her involvement with the Common Sense Oncology movement and efforts to adapt its frameworks for India are particularly close to her heart.

The Future of Cancer Care

Dr. Bhawna Sirohi is focused on building a future where cancer treatment is not only advanced but also accessible. One of her key areas of interest is de-escalation research, which aims to reduce the intensity of treatments without affecting outcomes. "We used to give radiotherapy for six weeks; now we can do it in one. That's what makes a difference in India," she explains.

Her work is grounded in the belief that innovation must serve real-world needs. She is currently involved in projects exploring AI-assisted diagnostics in mammography, robotic chemotherapy mixing, and clinical decision support systems to streamline treatment planning. Her focus remains clear: solutions that are scalable, affordable, and suitable for low- and middle-income countries.

Looking ahead, Dr. Sirohi hopes to see Balco Medical Centre evolve into a national model for protocol-driven, compassionate treatment in underserved regions. She also advocates for wider adoption of survivorship care, early detection systems, and equitable treatment across all public and private oncology centres in India.

More broadly, she calls on clinician-leaders to take an active role beyond the clinic as educators, policy contributors, and public advocates. "Doctors can no longer sit on the sidelines. If we want change, we must lead it ourselves," she says.

Influences That Shaped Her

Dr. Bhawna Sirohi's approach to leadership and care has been shaped by a range of mentors and personal influences across different stages of her life.

At Tata Memorial Hospital, Dr. Suresh Advani welcomed her into oncology, while in the UK, Dr. Ray Powles taught her the emotional intelligence of oncology. Clinicians like Dr. Ian Smith, Dr. David Cunningham, and Dr. Mary O'Brien also left a lasting impression on her, shaping her clinical decisions.

Her personal values, however, were rooted in family. Her maternal grandmother challenged the norms of her time, refusing to accept caste or gender-based inequality. Her father, who dared to raise a daughter with ambition and

integrity, and her mother, who quietly modelled strength and discipline. Her sisters, extended family, and lifelong friends have remained her anchor, sharing in her journey from a spirited childhood in army towns to the complex world of global oncology.

Each of these relationships, Dr. Sirohi says, helped her understand what it means to lead with conviction, compassion, and courage.

LEADERSHIP MANTRA

IN A WORLD THAT ONCE EXPECTED HER TO FOLLOW, DR. BHAWNA SIROHI CHOSE TO LEAD. SHE DIDN'T JUST BECOME A DOCTOR; SHE BECAME SOMEONE WHO CHALLENGED NORMS, BUILT SYSTEMS, AND STOOD UP FOR THOSE WITHOUT A VOICE.

TODAY, SHE IS SHAPING NOT ONLY HOW CANCER IS TREATED BUT ALSO HOW PATIENTS ARE SEEN, HEARD, AND SUPPORTED. FROM ARMY TOWNS TO GLOBAL PLATFORMS, HER JOURNEY REFLECTS RESILIENCE, PURPOSE, AND VISION. THE SYSTEMS SHE'S BUILDING, THE LIVES SHE'S TOUCHING, AND THE FUTURE SHE IS SHAPING ALL STAND AS TESTIMONY TO A LEADER WHOSE IMPACT TRANSCENDS BORDERS AND BENCHMARKS.

TO THE NEXT GENERATION OF HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS, ESPECIALLY YOUNG WOMEN, DR. SIROHI ADVISES, "STAY FOCUSED. LET PASSION, DISCIPLINE, AND COMMITMENT BE YOUR COMPASS. AND REMEMBER: IF YOU LOVE WHAT YOU DO, IT WON'T FEEL LIKE WORK. BUT DON'T FORGET TO CARE FOR YOUR MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH TOO. YOU CAN ONLY CARE FOR OTHERS IF YOU CARE FOR YOURSELF."

