

By Dr Mohamad Farid

Live STRONG, Die STRONG – Reflections on My Encounters with Cancer

All maladies malign
But only one bears the infamy of malignancy;
The quintessential adversary from within
The mercenaries of neoplasia are indubitably redoubtable
Rapacious renegades, savagely merciless mutineers
And far too often, impertinent emissaries of Death
The grim and trenchant irony of immortality
Asseverating life's fragile finitude.

On the body and spirit thus, duress leans heftily
As the tempestuous torrent descends –
Initial fleeting cameos of a foe most formidable;
Bewildering appraisal of vast arsenals largely mediocre;
Corporeal calamity of a sapping, devouring campaign;
Struggles with the psyche to seek sense in the inculpable;
Uncouth upheaval of plans, hopes, dreams, aspirations
As the erstwhile promise-filled future fades
Unceremoniously into the void.

Yet though the agony and anguish are enduring
The grating pain all too proximate, too palpable
It is strength that carves the deepest hollow
In the flat, formless plains of this practitioner's mind.
Strength = [stress (force per unit area) needed to break a material] –
Physics and semantics must at few occasions other
Have found such consummately congruent concord;
Strength - wellspring diverse, countenance varied, context protean
Yet substance strikingly singular.

Strength to go through battle with uncommon alacrity –
Greeting affliction with irreverent sanguinity,
Breadwinning untrammelled sans teeth, hair and voice,
Celebrating life's pleasures with gusto anew;
Strength to submit with venerable dignity –
Treading the shadowed valley poise scarcely ruffled
The shackles of resentment emphatically undone
As the Reaper is faced with liberated serenity;
Strength to pillar others' through a tumultuous journey –
Even if not directly afflicted, few souls can be stouter
Than those whose sorrow is stealthily shelved
To facilitate, nourish, reinforce others who matter.

Strength describes not unflinchingly immovable stoicism
Nor absolute equanimity in adversity's face;
No more so are tears and fears flagstaves of a feeble spiritual fabric;
Instead it conveys courage and sturdiness of character
The burly robustness of the human spirit
To mount a positive response, amplitude regardless
To the forces of destruction, devastation, desolation
Its triumph framed not in victory or defeat
But in the chastity of spontaneous expression
And the nurturing, rejuvenating glow it ceaselessly radiates
A paradox thus, that baffles less than it buoys –
Even as the enigmatic sojourn of sentient life
 Oft finds premature termination in cancer's throes
Much has this dreaded disease added
To the full blossoming of that very existence.

Live STRONG, die STRONG.



Mohamad Farid, 27, is a Medical Officer in the Department of Medical Oncology, National Cancer Centre. An ardent soccer fan, he busies himself lamenting ad nauseam the poor quality of today's footballers compared to days gone by (circa late 80s – AC Milan forever!!) – and oh yes, he plays the game once in a while.

