



Profile

## APS Chawla

**Visionary, Chair & Founder of  
Roko Cancer of the MKC Trust**



2016



## Foreword

Since 2005, when the first of Roko Cancer's fully-equipped mobile breast cancer screening units was launched in India, the charity's visionary chairman and founder APS Chawla has helped to save thousands of lives through his screening programme in Punjab which has tested over 400,000 women and men. He is the inspiration for the successful NRI Programme which invites non-resident Indians to support the charity and he is the powerhouse behind a charity which, in a powerful appraisal by the UK's Attorney General Dominic Grieve MP, was described as "punching above its weight."



APS Chawla is seen here launching New Delhi's Le Flamingo Club for cancer survivors set-up by Roko Cancer's Director Sudha Murgai

## Roko Cancer's success story

Roko Cancer has become a byword for cancer compassion, care and hope. The charity is proof of triumph over adversity as it was borne from the tragic death of a young mother - APS Chawla's first wife - who died in 1989 from breast cancer. Her symptoms, presented late, were too advanced to save her. Driven by grief and a pledge that no other family would suffer in the same way, APS Chawla worked hard to build Roko Cancer. His passion and conviction persuaded many to back him and although the road was long, the journey proved fruitful for in 2001, the charity was formally launched in the House of Commons and then in 2005, APS Chawla watched proudly as the first Roko Cancer Bus was presented to the Indian people as a symbol of hope.



## Driven by hope

Since then, the Roko Cancer buses have become a familiar sight throughout Punjab. APS Chawla was determined that the very poor, the elderly and the most vulnerable would benefit from Roko Cancer's mission. So the buses will travel to the most remote villages in India's rural and semi-rural villages. And such is the sheer need that people will queue from dawn once word gets around. Tough terrain includes Meghalaya, Punjab, Delhi, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Gujarat, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu and other areas that mainstream medical institutions are unable to visit.



This is just one of eight fully-equipped mobile cancer screening units offering a warm, friendly, courteous service to many who have never even heard the word cancer



## Powered by success

The Cancer Camps are staffed by Roko Cancer's dedicated team based in Punjab who offer everything from screening for breast, prostate, oral and cervical cancer to ECGs, diabetes testing, blood pressure monitoring, health advice and doing away with stigmas. And all for free. Nobody pays a penny for the service and no-one is ever turned away. This was one of the key aims of APS Chawla. The other was to do away with harmful "old tales" which continues to cause so much anxiety and fear when discussing cancer.



APS Chawla promotes the charity's work during an awareness drive in Southall West London





## Myth-busting

A Roko Cancer Camps report highlighted some of these myths - the following quotes are taken with permission but anonymously from women who have been screened by the charity: Below are just some of the comments we've heard concerning breast cancer when screening women in India:

**“Not breastfeeding your baby causes breast cancer”**

**“Mammograms cause breast cancer”**

**“You would know if you’ve got breast cancer”**

**“Having children early protects you from breast cancer”**

**“Surgery can cause breast cancer”**

**“Breast cancer is caused by food poisoning or tobacco”**

This is why one of the charity's central messages is "Please don't die from fear" and is the over-arching theme of a Roko Cancer documentary "Remember Me" - of which Professor Juliette Patnick, NHS Cancer Screening's Director was an advisor. The 15 minute film has been shown at award ceremonies, functions, support groups and work places, and can be seen on YouTube along with several other of the charity's films.



The Roko Cancer documentary is a visual and vivid reminder of why Roko Cancer exists



## Uniting businesses

APS Chawla is not one to rest on his laurels and with a report in The Lancet warning that by 2020, breast cancer in India will become an epidemic, he knows there is so much more to be done. This is why he is instrumental in working with corporations in India and the UK because as a former businessman, he knows that in helping to forge a link between two nations who have much in common, there is a greater opportunity for organisations and their employees to help spread the word on cancer awareness.



Sainsbury's Head Office in High Holborn was the venue for a 'Love Your Life' campaign

In the UK, Roko Cancer is known for tirelessly encouraging people to seek early medical intervention. Awareness drives and information sessions help drive home the message that the NHS - as wonderful as it is - can only do so much. The UK team, based in London's Whitechapel, works with BME, migrant groups and older people especially those who are vulnerable or on a very low income to help remove the fear of hospitals and to act as an advocacy.



## Empowering women

The personal story of how APS Chawla lost his wife is one that resonates especially with women and is used to help inspire busy mums and home-makers to prioritise their health as well as that of their loved ones. Usually such messages come from other women, but when a man urges women to empower themselves by taking ownership of their health, the message is reinforced.



APS Chawla is a keen champion of women's empowerment



## Support from the great and the good

Impressed by APS Chawla's work ethic, some very big names have supported him and in turn have encouraged donors at grassroots level to give to the charity.



Sir Tony Baldry MP is a warm supporter of Roko Cancer and APS Chawla





**Other champions include:**

Cherie Blair QC  
The Chief Minister of Punjab  
The Attorney General Dominic Grieve MP  
Lady Sandra Howard, Roko Cancer's Patron  
Lord Sheikh  
Lord Singh  
Baroness Amos  
Stephen Timms MP

Baroness Verma  
Lord Billimoria  
Lord Dholokia  
Keith Vaz MP  
Former Cabinet Member Geoff Hoon MP

As well as many other prominent dignitaries in the UK to highlight the disease among older and vulnerable communities.



## Always one step ahead

APS Chawla also 'walks the walk' and has inspired hundreds to take part in the Mumbai Marathon for Roko Cancer.



Surrounded by supporters, Roko Cancer's Chairman takes part in the 2014 Mumbai Marathon



This is what APS Chawla has to say about the positive fighting spirit of Roko Cancer

*"In a short space of time, we have touched a figure of over 53,0521 Examinations, 63,934 Mammograms and 3,117 positive cases which is nothing less than remarkable. It invokes a spirit which has waged war against ignorance in order to support those most at risk from cancer.*

*Our challenge is to fight cancer with passion and professionalism in order to create lasting results so that women and men can help themselves and their families by spreading the word on knowing what to look for and seeking early medical intervention if there's anything which doesn't feel quite right."*

The charity ensures its supporters are kept up-to-speed - there is always encouraging news thanks to the generosity of Roko Cancer's donors

Each quarter, Roko Cancer's India and UK teams highlight news and progress. The newsletter would be the size of a small phonebook if everything was to go in but it does offer a flavour of the charity's work:

## GLIMPSES




### Roko conducted Free Cancer Detection Camp in Budh Singh Wala, Punjab

Roko Cancer conducted a Free Cancer Awareness & Detection camp sponsored by NRI, Mr.Chamkaur Singh from UK for his village Budh Singh Wala on 27<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2013. The camp witnessed an excellent footfall of 570 patients. The camp facilities included ECG, BP monitoring and Blood Sugar Checkups apart from Breast, Cervical and Oral Cancer examination .

### Roko Conducted Mega Camp in Ratenda, Punjab

Roko Cancer conducted a Cancer Screening camp organized by UK based NRI, Mr.Mukhtair Singh Rana in his village Ratenda in Punjab on 3<sup>rd</sup> Dec, 2013. Total no. of males and females examined were 320. The camp included facilities like Blood Pressure and Blood Sugar examination apart from Cancer Screening.

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Here are just some of the groups who APS Chawla and Roko Cancer have worked with:



It is important for APS Chawla personally to share with the people who help make his mission possible





## GLIMPSES

### Roko conducted cancer awareness and detection camps in Tura Garo hills region

RCCT team in Tura has been conducting camps wherever possible even with police escort to the interior areas where law enforcement personnel also refuse to venture in, keeping in mind the very aims of Roko Cancer – *'to reach to the doorsteps of people'*. The Roko Cancer Tura centre has made an arrangement both with the Civil Hospital and Maternity & Child Hospital, Tura to accept referral of patients both for Breast examination & mammograms and also for Cervix examinations & Pap smear test on the non-camp days. There have been few referrals so far for both mammogram and Pap smear test from the hospitals. We have also added Tura Christian Hospital for referral service.

### Roko Cancer Shillong participated in various Awareness & Detection programs and started counselling sessions

Roko Cancer Campaign Shillong team started counselling sessions at Roko Cancer Office in Civil Hospital for patients who come directly from various places where the Detection camps are taking place. The Roko Cancer staff is also involved in informing and coordinating with patients for further investigations to bring them to Shillong on a specific date and these patients who require further investigations are then escorted by the Roko Cancer Staff to various hospitals for their respective investigations. On the occasion of International Women's Day the Inner Wheel Rotary Club invited Roko Cancer to organize a special camp for the women for Breast & Cervix Cancer Detection. This camp was very well attended & the Inner Wheel Club appreciated the efforts of Roko Cancer in Meghalaya.

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### Two new additions to Roko Cancer fleet

We are proud to announce that MKC trust has donated two new buses to Roko cancer—one equipped with Siemens mammography machine and the other having mobile test laboratory cum theatre facility. Both have been launched in month of March 2014 and has started working for the cause.

### Roko a part of National BME Cancer Alliance

In February a meeting at NHS England with the National BME Cancer Alliance was very productive. A group of like-minded people have formed a committee to act as an advocacy for cancer patients with the aim of influencing government policy. The 'National BME Cancer Voice' held at Parliament featured Roko Cancer as a guest. Fabian Hamilton MP was the host and it gave interested parties an opportunity to come together as a voice for the many who go unheard.





Those who hear APS Chawla speak passionately about his dedication and commitment cannot fail to be moved. In May, the Lions Club of Coventry presented both him and Trustee Nikita Chawla (right) with a cheque for £2,500.



And in 2013, Roko Cancer was named by Indialink as its Charity of the Decade



## APS Chawla inspires men to fight breast cancer

Thanks to his drive and determination, APS Chawla is helping to remove the stigma from breast cancer. From a disease which was never discussed, it is now an illness viewed with sympathy and understanding. Crucially, men have come on board and are supporting their wives, daughters, mothers and aunts to get themselves checked out and to know the warning signs.



Men in India are now joining women on awareness walks thanks to the example shown by APS Chawla



## Cancer in the developing world

In the UK, women and men have a greater awareness of cancer and its early warning signs. Of course, with over 200 different types of cancer, there is no one typical type of symptom but doctors are agreed that excessive tiredness, unexplained weight loss, an unfamiliar lump or an unusual pain are all signs that something may be amiss.

And although there is anxiety among older people in BME communities where faith, culture and tradition are strongly respected - generally, cancer is a topic that is known and discussed amongst the general population. In India however that is not always the case. APS Chawla, in visits to the cancer detection camps, has seen for himself the sometimes total lack of knowledge surrounding cancer. The following facts and figures on breast cancer and cancer in general survival rates in India and the developing world make for sombre reading.

In 2012 scientific journal The Lancet reported a breast cancer epidemic by 2020 amongst India's young

The sub-continent, home to 17% of the world's population, has begun to experience higher rates of breast cancer

A decade ago, the age range of a typical diagnosis was between 45 – 55. It is now 35-45. Doctors believe this is due to changes in lifestyle.

Dr K S Gopianath, Senior Consultant & Surgical Oncologist, told The Times of India that 'girls as young as 18 are presenting with the disease.'

Seventy percent of those with cancer worldwide are in developing countries with a fifth in India.

A global study commissioned by GE Healthcare estimates that by 2030, incidence rates of new breast cancer cases in India will increase from 115,000 to around 200,000 per year.

In addition, the World Health Organisation (WHO) states that low survival rates in less developed countries are due to a trinity of a lack of early detection programmes, lack of adequate diagnosis and a lack of treatment facilities.

WHO estimates that approx 80,000 women in India will be affected by breast cancer each year.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (established by WHO) estimate that by 2015, around 2,500,000 new cases of breast cancer will occur.

The Indian Council of Medical Research states that 'breast cancer has overtaken cervical cancer as the leading cause of cancer-related deaths among Indian women'.

Dr Umberto Veronese, Scientific Director of the European Institute of Oncology in Italy believes that 'breast cancer will become an epidemic in India if the country does not put in place a vigorous mechanism for early detection and awareness-building'.





## Inspiring and protecting the next generation

This is why APS Chawla is enthused for the younger generation to be as clued-up as possible on breast cancer. In New Delhi and Punjab, Roko Cancer's teams visit schools and colleges to equip students - in a friendly, informal and open manner - with the knowledge needed to protect or detect breast cancer. The interactive sessions (seen below) have proved informative and popular.



## Respecting and cherishing the elder generation

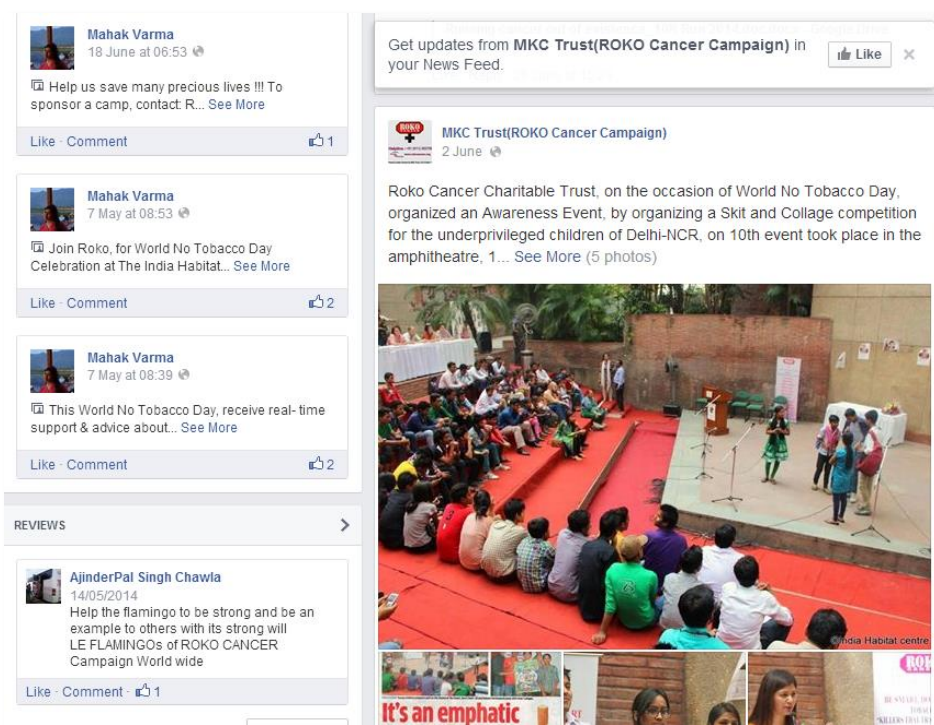
It's just as important for Roko Cancer to reach out to our older people and ensure mammographies and screenings are attended. In the UK, Roko Cancer joined Public Health England's campaign to encourage women over 60 to attend breast screenings as their belief was that, in being older and past childbearing age, breast cancer would no longer be an issue for them - a line of thinking that was increasing the incidence rates of breast cancer in older women.





## Roko Cancer online

Roko Cancer has a growing presence online. The charity's Twitter and Facebook pages are encouraged by APS Chawla as another means of reaching out, especially, to the digital generation.



## The future

The hope for any cancer charity is that one day a cure will, as one Director General of Cancer Research UK put it, happily "put him out of business". Until that day, the work of organisations like Roko Cancer will continue in being a voice for and supporting the most vulnerable in society.

APS Chawla who is a regular on Zee TV and the Sikh Channel gave an interview at a Supporters' Thank You this year to declare that although much had been accomplished, it was just the tip of the iceberg...



APS Chawla giving a TV interview at the House of Commons in April 2014

To find out more about Roko Cancer visit [www.rokocancer.org](http://www.rokocancer.org) or view the charity's films and documentaries on YouTube. Alternatively visit our Facebook and Twitter pages.  
If you'd like to make a donation, email Nikita Chawla at [finadmin@rokocancer.org](mailto:finadmin@rokocancer.org)

From everyone here at Roko Cancer in India and the UK



*Thank You*



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