

SPOTLIGHT

A chance to get to know the young adults with cancer in your community

For the July 2021 *Spotlight*, we could not be more thrilled to feature Hamood Al Gazaly during Sarcoma Awareness Month



Hamood came to the U.S. five years ago from Yemen to reunite with his family in Bakersfield and chase his dream to become an architect. At the age of 24, he was diagnosed with high-grade Sarcoma in October 2020 and went through surgery and 5 cycles of chemo at USC during the pandemic. Now he is cancer free.

AYA@USC: What has been the 'Rose' and 'Thorn' of your cancer experience?

There are many "roses" of my cancer experiences. I have a very supportive family and caring friends. My parents drove me from Bakersfield to Los Angeles for all my appointments and waited at the hospital or outside. My brother shaved his head after I shaved mine, and the next day my friends showed up in a surprise visit with their heads shaved as well.

I am also very grateful to the doctors, nurses, staff and everyone who provided the best care for me during my surgery and treatment at USC. They also helped me bank sperm to preserve fertility before starting chemo. The nurses were super nice and kind. They comforted me when I was crying for pain after surgery, when I was nervous before starting my first chemo and when I could not help throwing up on the floor. It is truly a tough job to work in the cancer field, like fighting a war.

One of the "thorns" was that my high grade sarcoma affected the bladder, the rectum and the prostate. I had to have a colostomy bag for seven months! It is definitely different from the natural design God gave to us. I finally did the last surgery in June 2021 to reverse it back to normal.

AYA@USC: What are some suggestions that you would give to people who are still in cancer treatment?

Pray and trust God.

Surround yourself with people who are encouraging and caring. One of my friends searched on internet and told me that the type of high grade sarcoma that I was diagnosed had very low chance of survival. That was not helpful at all 😊

Don't feel "guilty" or blame yourself for getting cancer. At the beginning, I kept asking myself why and why me? Later I learned that cancer can hit anyone and at any age.

It is important to follow instructions from doctors and the care team and always put in your best efforts to collaborate.

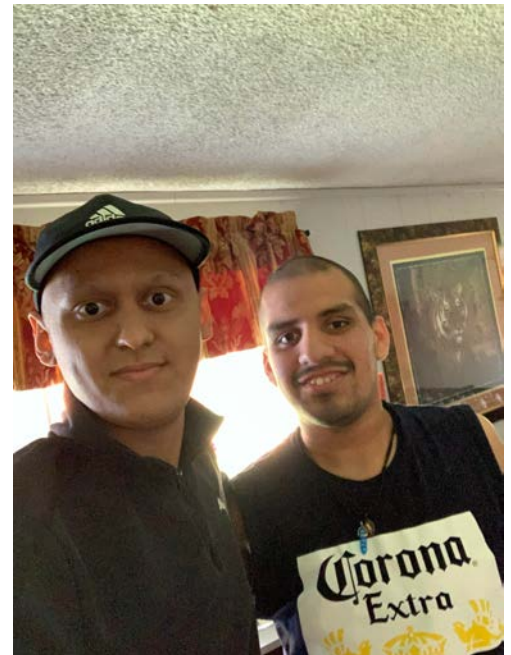
Stay active and connected. My energy differed tremendously when I walked around the hospital talking to people instead of staying in bed with my mind filled with dreadful thoughts. It was a terrible feeling to be alone during the pandemic in the hospital when there were no visitors allowed. Always talk to your family and friends and also try to make new friends at the hospital and chemo. Bring your favorite books, music, games, photos and anything that would cheer you up and give you strength to hospital stay or chemo.

AYA@USC: Are there any quotes or sayings that you have remembered or found helpful?

Cancer can hit anyone, but you are NOT ALONE.

AYA@USC: Between need to do, have to do, and want to do- how do you spend your days?

When I came to the U.S. five years ago, I did not speak English at all. I learned English from adult school and later finished high school. I was going to community college before my cancer diagnosis. During my cancer treatment, I often kept myself busy "planning" for my future, rehearsing how I will graduate from school with an associate degree, transfer to a university, find a job as an architect, get married and have kids. These "planning" energized me through the cancer treatments. Now I can't wait to start my sophomore year in college and at the same time help in my family's restaurant as much as I can. Like what the doctor told me on the day of being "cancer free", I am resetting my clock now and every minute counts!



AYA@USC: Have you been forced, or chosen to change your life in any meaningful way because of your diagnosis?

During my hospital stay, I truly understood what cancer can do to a person and how important it is to have emotional support. I had many "cancer" friends of all ages at USC. We formed a group and walked around the hospital as much as we were allowed. We also knocked on doors to introduce ourselves to people who unfortunately had to stay in bed. This peer support really helped us bond deeply.

Last month I met up with one hospital friend and his family at a local burger restaurant who lived half an hour away from Bakersfield. We talked a lot in tears. I also drove down to San Bernardino and spent a day with another friend whose cancer came back and spread to other parts of his body. Even though it was a long day, I was truly happy to be there. I keep praying for him and many of my cancer friends.

Sometimes when I run into other people with cancer, I would introduce myself as well. They feel like my neighbors and we are all connected.



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