

phenomenal

By Gertrude Mutyaba.

Getting her life and purpose back after cancer

COURAGEOUS. When 35-year-old Agnes Nayiga was diagnosed with breast cancer, she lost her job and her husband but she did not lose hope. After undergoing treatment, she started a cancer foundation to help others like her. She shared her story with **GERTRUDE MUTYABA.**

In 2013, Agnes Nayiga, who holds a Bachelor of Science in education was an administrator at a hospital in Kampala. For the mother of two, who hails from Lunguja in Rubaga Division of Kampala District, trouble began when she started experiencing an itch in her right breast three months after she stopped breastfeeding her youngest son.

"My breast started oozing blood a few months after my son had stopped breast feeding. I found this strange because prior to that, I felt fine with no problem. This forced me to run to the nearby hospital for a medical checkup. The doctor referred me to Mulago Cancer Institute where the test results showed I had hormonal imbalance," Nayiga explains.

Following the tests, Nayiga was advised that her nipple should be removed to stop the problem. After the nipple removal, Nayiga felt better. With no more itching on her breast, she relaxed, hoping that all was well.

In December 2015, the same breast developed complications and started swelling to the extent that it was too heavy for her body.

"I went to Mulago Cancer Institute for another test and I was diagnosed with breast cancer and the whole breast was cut off at Kololo Hospital," She adds. In

the meantime, she had nowhere to leave her children who by that time had been abandoned by their father, her husband.

With a smile on her face, Nayiga says: "What always scared me the most was the number of cancer patients dying each day. I always prayed that I would not be the next and thank God I survived."

A firm support network

"When I lost my job and my husband, I thought my world had ended, but because

ADVICE FOR CANCER PATIENTS

Nayiga advises cancer patients to eat food such as brown rice, natural sugars, peas and beans, avoiding alcohol, pizza, potato, chips and chicken and also consider doing exercises and in the case of particular cancer types, she advises maintaining good hygiene and taking great care while using public toilets among others.



Top: Agnes Nayiga poses with musician and Kyadondo East MP Robert Kyagulanyi (Bob Wine) after her last surgery. Left, Nayiga after her first operation. COURTESY PHOTOS.



treatment mode made her hair fall off, her skin turned dark and she developed wounds all over her body. She also lost weight.

"Due to the changes on my body, my children would cry whenever they saw me and this worried me," she recalls.

When asked whether she is now cancer-free, Nayiga laughs and says it will take long for her to believe that she is free from cancer.

"I cannot lie that I am (cancer) free now because I am still undergoing treatment and checkup every three months and on this, it will be the doctors to announce that I am free," She says.

She reveals that more than Shs200m was spent on both surgeries including the cost of feeding and travel, among other requirements.

Hope after cancer

Nayiga cautions people especially cancer patients to avoid being negative because before they turn cancerous, cancer cells are normal cells in people's bodies.

Nayiga did not wallow in self-pity. She attributes her strength to prayer, which kept her going during the treatment process. "If it had not been for God, I would not be speaking to you now. Every doctor who worked on me told me, had I delayed another month, I would have died. People find it hard to believe that I did not die based on my condition," she says.

After realising how precious life is, Nayiga opted to restore hope for many who thought they were useless. She started a foundation with the intention of helping those diagnosed with cancer of all types.

The Cancer Pulse Foundation is located on Hannington Centre in Kampala and has a membership of 40 people including men, women, children and youth.

"The foundation is rehabilitating people affected by cancer, and runs cancer awareness programmes. We give them nutritional talks (on the kinds of food they should take) and also direct them to doctors who can quickly help them," adds Nayiga.

God never forsakes his people, friends stood with me and they tirelessly collected a huge sum of money for my surgery," She adds.

Nayiga did her first surgery which was a success.

"The Democratic Party President Norbert Mao launched a fundraising campaign for me and this was a success, we got all the money required," Nayiga says.

After surgery, her doctor advised that another breast should be cut off to avoid recurrence and this was carried out at Lea Memorial Hospital in Entebbe.

Lonely road as a cancer patient

Nayiga explains that her family was traumatised throughout her illness and treatment. Most of her family abandoned her because they feared she would never get better.

"During that period of trauma, no person would wish to be a widow or widower and everyone distances him or herself from you because your body changes," She adds.

Her husband left her because he thought she would die. She explains that she was considered a useless person and she felt so lonely that she asked God to take her life.

However, after the two surgeries, Nayiga has come to the conclusion that she can survive without a man.

"A time came when I accepted that I was useless to him (my husband) and I also accepted that I would live without breasts and, life is really moving on well," Nayiga says, adding that she will not remarry as she is currently concentrating on raising her children.

Cost of surgery

The chemotherapy she was given after surgery changed her body completely. The

