

25 Years of TKI and 25 Years of Friends of Max

Two Transformative Journeys. One Shared Mission.

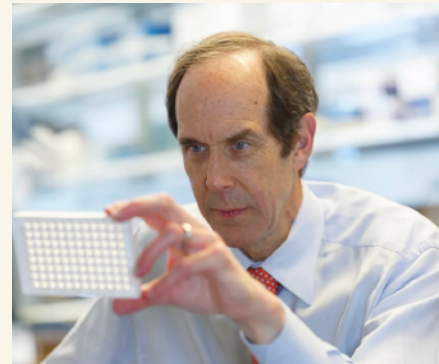
Dr Brian Druker, MD, on how the discovery of TKI was revolutionary in a way: CML, what was once considered a life-threatening diagnosis became, for many, a manageable chronic condition.

“It is a remarkable and magic moment of reflection because some of the patients on that phase one, first in human trial are still with me... And they've seen weddings, births, graduations, grandchildren — all the things that they never thought that they could imagine would happen.”

Source

— Dr. Brian Druker

Dr Druker helped develop Glivec, the first medication that specifically targeted cancer cells turned a lethal leukemia into a manageable illness. Patients with a devastating form of leukemia - Chronic Myeloid Leukemia, or CML - could suddenly expect a normal life span.



Dr. Brian Druker, director of the Knight Cancer Institute at Oregon Health & Science University, championed the drug that became Glivec. Kristyna Wentz-Graff/Oregon Health & Science University



Pat Garcia-Gonzalez, Cofounder and CEO of The Max Foundation.

Pat Garcia-Gonzalez is the CEO and co-founder of The Max Foundation, which was established in 1997 in honour of her stepson, Maximiliano “Max” Rivarola. Max was diagnosed with Chronic Myeloid Leukemia (CML) at the age of 14 in 1989 and passed away after three years. In his memory Pat has dedicated herself to the well being of patients and their families world over.

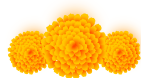
“In the early 1990s, I had a premonition that someday a medicine would exist that could have saved my stepson, Max. I didn't know when, or how, but I knew it would come. That day arrived on May 10, 2001, with the approval of the first tyrosine kinase inhibitor (TKI)... These past years have brought extraordinary progress. CML was transformed from a fatal disease into a manageable one.”

Source

“Since its inception, Friends of Max has served as the patient support arm of The Max Foundation. We are a united force. We are grateful for our partnership of so many years and full of hope as we look ahead to how much we can accomplish together.”

— Pat Garcia-Gonzalez

Source



A Special Tribute to Ranjit Shahani

It seems impossible that the one person to whom we owe so much is not here with us today as we celebrate 25 years of Glivec! Ranjit Shahani was much more to us than the Vice Chairman and Managing Director of Novartis India. It was under him that the access program bringing the Gift of Life in the form of Glivec to CML patients took wings.

He ensured every patient in need was enrolled into the programme and gave The Max Foundation all the support needed to facilitate the setting up of a project of such magnitude.

He was adored by the patients for whom he was family as he was for all of us at Friends of Max.



A momentous coming together: Bombay, June 2002
Ranjit Shahani (center) seen with Daniel Vasella, CEO and Chairman of Novartis and Viji Venkatesh, Region Head The Max Foundation and Managing Trustee, Friend of Max.

25 years is a lifetime. 25 years is a quarter of a century. 25 years is 25 years more of life with loved ones in a family sentenced with a diagnosis of a fatal, life limiting; nay, life threatening condition. 25 years is that many more Christmases and Idd and Diwalis with family and friends; it is seeing your children grow, it is getting married and having your own children and it is that many more years to cherish all that this gift of life brings to us. And to have been part of creating and wrapping and delivering this Gift of Life to

thousands of people facing certain death ... there cannot be a more humbling experience than that.

As we commemorate the 25th Anniversary of the advent of the Magic Bullet that burst upon the firmament of cancer treatment, we salute our partners in this incredible journey.

- Viji Venkatesh
Managing Trustee, Friends of Max, Member, Board of Directors,
The Max Foundation and Trustee, Being Human Salman Khan Foundation

TKIs transformed CML treatment

FOM transformed the patient experience



Founded 25 years ago with a vision that no CML and GIST patient should live a diminished or compromised life and face the journey alone.

What began as a support network has grown into a powerful movement connecting patients, caregivers, physicians, volunteers and advocates across the country.

Over the last quarter century, the stories of TKIs and FOM have become inseparable.

In this newsletter we bring to you two stories of those CML and GIST patients (of many) who till today, are living testament to the magic Glivec continues to work upon them. For all those 25 years and more we hope.

Shylaja B S CML

Shylaja represents the very spirit of the CML community — a symbol of courage, hope, discipline and perseverance. To all of us, she remains a shining example of dignity and the strength required to embrace the unknown with faith and determination.

In September 1994, Shylaja from Bangalore, a young mother with a one-year-old daughter and a seven-year-old son, was diagnosed with Chronic Myeloid Leukemia (CML). As per the treatment protocols of that time, she was started on Hydrea and Interferon therapy. In those days, blood cancer — often portrayed in the most frightening manner in films and popular culture was considered life-altering not only for the patient, but for the entire family. The expected survival with the available therapies was limited, and hope was often uncertain.

With the guidance and support of her treating physician, Dr. Shekhar Patil of HCG Bangalore, and through the tireless efforts of her husband Shankar, Shylaja was enrolled in the STI-571 Phase II clinical trial in Singapore. Enrolling in a clinical trial at that time required extraordinary courage. In Shankar's words, "Very little was known about the effectiveness or long-term side effects of this new drug, later known to the world as Glivec (Imatinib). Yet, Shylaja chose hope over fear and stepped into the unknown with remarkable determination."

When Glivec was eventually approved and the GIPAP (Glivec International Patient Assistance Program) was launched, Shylaja became one of the earliest beneficiaries of the access program in India. She has continued on Glivec therapy since 2000.

Says Shankar, "In the early years of Glivec treatment — from 2001 to 2010 — there was very little information available regarding the long-term effects, management issues, or outcomes associated with the drug. During this period, the Friends of Max (FOM) team encouraged and coordinated a small but deeply connected group of patients and caregivers in Bangalore who met regularly every month to share experiences, concerns, and encouragement.



These meetings became a vital source of emotional strength and practical guidance, especially for newly diagnosed patients struggling to cope with the trauma of a cancer diagnosis. The group helped build confidence, resilience, and hope at a time when information and support systems were scarce."

As deeply committed members of FOM, both Shylaja and Shankar have been a source of inspiration to countless patients and families who are now part of the extended FOM family.

Shankar's relentless pursuit of the best possible treatment for his wife naturally evolved into a larger mission. In his own words, "encouraging fellow patients and caregivers to explore every avenue toward better health and well-being, and to never lose hope in the face of cancer."

Shylaja, in her own quiet and gentle manner, has always embodied grace, resilience, and unwavering strength in the face of adversity. Simply being in her presence has given many of us immense confidence about our own future and the possibilities that lie ahead despite a diagnosis of CML.

(As told by Viji Venkatesh)

Vasamvada Shukla GIST

Vasamvada Shukla is our GIST patient advocate and yes, been on Glivec ever since we was diagnosed 25 years ago. By her side all these years as a committed caregiver and FOM City Chapter Leader has been her husband Vinay Shukla and her daughters Prachi and Pallavi .

Thank you Pallavi for sending us this inspiring testimony of your mother's journey

In 1999, our family's world was suddenly and profoundly shaken when my mother was diagnosed with a rare and life-threatening cancer called a Gastrointestinal Stromal Tumor (GIST).

The rare seem to love her—Her name Vasamvada is very rare—I did a deep dive and could find only a few hundred people with this name, her blood group is AB Negative (just 0.5-1% of the global population) and she was diagnosed with GIST (a rare tumor making up about 0.1% of total cancers diagnosed worldwide). That's my MOM-rare.

The news shook our world and the ground beneath us crumbled further when, even after enduring two major surgeries, the doctors discovered the cancer had spread, resulting in liver metastases. In those days, the medical landscape had no answers and standard treatments held little promise. Yet, faced with a diagnosis that threatened to steal her future, my mother chose to meet the storm with an immense and quiet strength. My dad walked with her every step of the way and was her rock solid support with my sister, and me—standing fiercely and tightly by her side. My mother refused to let the illness consume her life. Remarkably, throughout the grueling reality of surgeries and the heavy emotional weight of cancer, she continued her vital work as the Principal of her school serving as a pillar of leadership for her community while privately fighting for her life. Then Dr. S H Advani informed us about a revolutionary targeted therapy called Glivec and it brought a beacon of hope in our lives. But, it also brought agonizing financial strain. The medication was overwhelmingly expensive. Our family stretched every resource to purchase it out-of-pocket for a short time. We were getting desperate as we couldn't afford to continue buying the medication indefinitely.

Then a God-sent miracle reached us. This was GIPAP—The Glivec International Patient Assistance Program (GIPAP). This patient assistance program, run by Novartis and administered by The Max Foundation, threw our family a lifeline, providing my mother her medication entirely free of charge. My mother was the first GIST patient to be approved under the program. Mom responded very positively to the medication and was disease free within 03 years of starting Glivec and continues to do so.



This profound, life-saving grace transformed not only my mother's life, but my own. Deeply moved by the help that saved our family, I was drawn into volunteering for the Friends of Max—a support group for many other families like ours who were fighting the same battle. We came together sharing our struggles and deriving strength and hope from each other and thus was born our motto - Together we share and learn.

After working as a volunteer for the FOM, I formally joined The Max Foundation as a Program Officer helping other families navigate this terrifying terrain—guiding them to fight this life-threatening diagnosis with the same hope, dignity, and grace that my mother did. During my three years as a Program Officer I met so many simple yet very special people who gave me some very special and precious experiences that I still hold very close to my heart.

Today, 25 years since the dawn of Glivec, the journey continues. A quarter of a century later, my mother still takes her medication every single day. There are always small bumps, ups, downs, and unexpected turns along the way, but she continues to overcome every single one of them with strength and a smile that amazes everyone who learns of her journey. She remains the pillar of strength for our entire family, keeping us all grounded, united, and focused on moving ahead. Her survival is a beautiful testament to the power of medical science, the fierce love of a family, and the beautiful ripple effect of a miracle called Glivec.

(As told by Dr Pallavi Misra,
Senior Specialist – Obstetrics & Gynecology)



IN THE MEDIA:

Friends of Max featured in **The Cancer World - The Max Foundation Special Issue 2026**, as part of the global CML community including clinicians, researchers, patients and advocates.

This is indeed an acknowledgment FOM is proud of - being seen as a strong support group for the CML and GIST patients marking 25 years of TKIs that have transformed treatment, diagnostic, access and patient advocacy.

Source

Chai for Cancer

Supporting those living with CML & GIST and on lifelong treatment

Over the last 13 years the unique awareness and fundraising campaign Chai for Cancer has proven to be an ideal platform to reach out to families coping with cancer as well as providing emotional support that is necessary in what can be an otherwise arduous journey.

Equally important, Chai for Cancer has evolved into a successful fundraising initiative. Over a cup of chai the movement brings together patients, caregivers, healthcare professionals, volunteers and supporters on a common platform. The campaign continues to support patients ensuring that Friends of Max can focus on its patient centric activities empowering those affected by CML and GIST across India.



MAY 23 DELHI
The annual tradition led by **Dr Dinesh Bhurani** and his team continues with an Adda hosted by the **Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Institute & Research Centre** on 23rd May.



APR 19 PATNA
Drs Pritanjali and Vijay Singh, both leading oncologists of the city and dedicated followers and supporters of Friends of Max, hosted an Adda in Patna on 19th April.



MAY 24 NEW DELHI
Yet another Delhi tradition is **The Lodhi Gardens Adda**, held this year on 24th May hosted by the **Delhi FOM City Chapter Leaders**.

Adda Diary April-June 2026:



MAY 10 MUMBAI
Season 13 was launched at the **Taj Mahal Tea House** in Mumbai on 10th May.



JUN 06 MUMBAI
On 6th June **Tata Memorial Hospital Mumbai Patient Meeting** ended with an Adda hosted by the Max Team with patients and caregivers in attendance.



OTHER ACTIVITIES:

Patient Support Group Meetings

- Apr 11, 2026** in Jammu at the Government Medical College
- Apr 18, 2026** in Patna at AIIMS
- May 09, 2026** in Mysore at Bharat Hospital and Institute of Oncology
- Jun 06, 2026** in Mumbai at Tata Memorial Hospital, Parel

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To Donate:

Cheques should be drawn in favour of Friends of Max and couriered to our office in Worli (Mumbai). To donate online visit www.friendsofmax.info. Receipts u/s 80 G of Income Tax Act, 1961 will be issued.

Friends of Max is registered as a Public Charitable Trust: Regn No E-24284(B) Mumbai, dated 4-7-2007