

Cancer and depression patient fights back to achieve success in agribusiness

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According to Rasyada in 2021, her business venture received several grants from the state (Johor) and federal governments such as the Young Agropreneur Grant (Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security), Belia Tani grant (Johor Agriculture Department) and aid from MARA in addition to community-based and innovation grants. - Pic credit Facebook Rasyada A. Rahman

KUALA LUMPUR: "God has taken away the grace of intellect from me but He has not taken away my fighting spirit," said a woman entrepreneur who runs a grey oyster mushroom business catering for the market in and around Batu Pahat, Johor.

While working out at a gym, Rasyada A. Rahman @ Rahim, 37, collapsed due to exhaustion, leading to her being diagnosed with lymphoma cancer.

"I was diagnosed in September 2016 while pursuing a doctorate in biotechnology at the International Islamic University of Malaysia in Kuantan," said Rasyada when contacted via the Zoom application recently.

According to Rasyada, an eight-centimetre (cm) tumour was detected in her lungs and as a result, she had to undergo six cycles of chemotherapy.

"While still in chemotherapy, I was determined to continue with my studies but after four months of treatment I was confirmed to have Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) stemming from the stress caused by the expectations of those around me who wanted me to function normally, as well as self-imposed expectations," said the entrepreneur.

Finding that her mental capacity and focus were diminishing due to MDD, Rasyada decided to engage in activities outside her field of study.

"I know I must fight these diseases, so I need to be doing something that I have not tried before, namely agriculture and business. I did my research on (the cultivation of) oyster mushrooms and technology-related (agriculture) such as chilli fertigation systems and hydroponics.

"I also researched what the country needs, the relevant policies such as agro-food policy and types of aid that I can get before opening Ada Fresh Farm," she said.

According to Rasyada, patients must find ways to divert their focus and improve their brain functions and she was motivated to do so after seeking treatment and taking medications.

After conducting trials for chilli fertigation systems and hydroponics, Rasyada finally decided to venture into oyster mushroom farming in 2019. It was the best decision for her because, after two years of being diagnosed with MDD, doctors declared that she had recovered.

"The process of building the business helped in my recovery from MDD because I had put all my focus on this enterprise and now, I don't need to take medications," she said.

According to Rasyada in 2021, her business venture received several grants from the state (Johor) and federal governments such as the Young Agropreneur Grant (Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security), Belia Tani grant (Johor Agriculture Department) and aid from Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) in addition to community-based and innovation grants.

Starting last year, she forged a collaboration with Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al-Sultan Abdullah (UMPSA) in terms of placement for students undergoing industrial training, conducting awareness programmes on mushroom cultivation in the community and cooperation in building a cooling system for mushroom houses using the Internet of Things and solar energy, she said.

She said that the farm won the gold and silver medals during the 2023 Innovation Day hosted by the Johor Agriculture Department, adding that she will attend the Women in Tech conference in Taiwan next month fully sponsored.

"It's okay not to be okay. Whatever challenges that may come our way, we must fight for ourselves. Have the intention in our heart to do things that benefit other people, InsyaAllah, God is with us," she said. – Bernama