

# A place of life and leisure



**Linda Kamal** set up the Centre Otium after having cancer. It offers guests a space to rest and convalesce

TEXT  
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PHOTO  
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# “When I got my breast cancer diagnosis, it was as if my life had been hit by a tsunami”

LINDA KAMAL

**I**t's only a few minutes' walk from the functional concrete buildings of the Geneva University Hospitals (HUG) to Place des Philosophes. In this genteel neighbourhood, modern townhouses blend seamlessly into stately older buildings with their wrought-iron balustrades and decorative façades. Here, on a plain black door, the name Centre Otium is spelled out in bold capital letters. “This is a place of life,” Linda Kamal, the Centre’s founder, says.

The Centre Otium provides care and support to cancer patients and their relatives during and after their treatment, offering 40 different therapies. “We want people to feel at ease with us here,” Kamal says. “If you have cancer, you can practice yoga, receive acupuncture treatment, meditate and much more here at the Centre.” The Centre Otium also offers advice about hair replacement and breast prostheses as well as psychological support for patients and their relatives.

Ten years ago, Kamal herself was diagnosed with breast cancer: “It was as if my life had been hit by a tsunami,” she recalls. At the time, she was working in the marketing department of a Swiss bank. “I loved my job. It gave me the opportunity to travel and meet interesting people.” Her two daughters were four and one when the diagnosis came. “When you get cancer, you lose your hair, your identity,” Kamal explains. “You look in the mirror, and you don’t recognise yourself.”

Her doctors drew up a treatment plan. “Cancer patients have busy schedules – just like politicians,” Kamal says. One appointment follows the next, and you run from one clinic to the next. “I dreamed of having a place where I could find all the therapies under one roof.” A place that would also treat the side effects of chemotherapy and radiation therapy, such as fatigue and anxiety.

Kamal visited centres of this type in France, England and Belgium. “I prepared feasibility studies, wrote dossiers – all the activities I used to do in marketing projects.” The most difficult task was, and remains, finding donors: “The foundation lives solely on private donations.” Through this work, Linda Kamal has succeeded in ensuring that visiting the Centre is no longer dependent on how much money someone has: “It’s all about the people. Our therapies shouldn’t just be aimed at those who can afford them, but rather should be accessible to everyone.”

Up to 190 patients visit the Centre Otium in Geneva every week. They often come following recommendations from doctors at the nearby university hospital. Or vice versa: “One doctor came to us because 15 of his patients told him about us.”

The Centre Otium provides therapeutic treatments not only for the body, but also for the mind and spirit – including massage, meditation and yoga





The Centre works with a committee comprising eight specialists, among them oncologists, endocrinologists and psychiatrists. Kamal emphasises that the Centre always works hand in hand with doctors, “never against conventional medicine.”

The Centre’s rooms are deliberately designed to look very different from typical hospital treatment rooms. There are no visible monitors or computers, and the therapists don’t wear white coats. Instead, the wooden walls and soft green furniture convey a sense of peace and warmth. “Here, there’s no ought to do, no obligations.” Depending on if visitors would like to have contact with fellow patients, they can choose between individual or group therapy. A small library, a café and a tranquil garden invite visitors to linger and relax.

The Centre now also offers its services to businesses. “Many patients continue to struggle with exhaustion at work after their treatments,” Kamal explains, speaking from her own experience. The Centre therefore has an instructor who trains business owners on how to support employees with cancer who are returning to work.

Kamal’s energy seems inexhaustible. When asked if she would like to open a similar centre in another location, she mentions plans for five additional centres in Switzerland alone. One thing is certain: they will all bear the name *Otium* – a fitting name, since it is the Latin word for leisure. 

A team of professionals is on hand to advise patients on matters such as hair replacement and breast prostheses

## Linda Kamal

She spent many years working for a Swiss bank as a marketing and communications expert. A mother of two, her experiences as a cancer patient taught her about what was missing from standard treatment programmes, prompting her to set up the **Centre Otium** in Geneva. The Centre offers comprehensive support for dealing with the side effects of cancer therapies – everything from meditation and yoga to advice on hair replacement. The 190 patients who visit each week benefit from a range of over 40 therapies. Linda Kamal’s success story is set to continue; she plans to open additional centres at other locations in Switzerland.

› [otium.center](http://otium.center)