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“India has strong medical talent, increasing health awareness, and a real need for structured preventive care”

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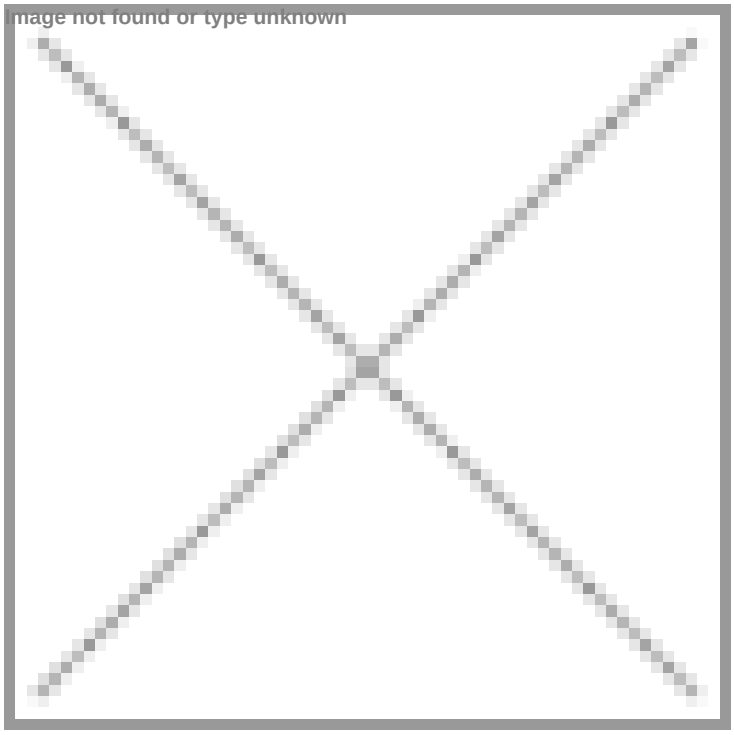
Preventive healthcare has long been an integral part of Japan’s medical system, where annual health check-ups are mandatory and early detection is key to improving population health outcomes. Launched in Bengaluru in 2021, NURA—India’s first AI-powered preventive health screening centre—is a collaboration between Fujifilm’s advanced imaging technology and Dr Kutty’s Healthcare’s clinical expertise. Designed to deliver comprehensive screenings in under 120 minutes with same-day reporting, NURA brings Japan’s preventive care ethos to India. In an interview with BioSpectrum, Masaharu Morita, Founder & Program Director, NURA, reflects on his five-year journey and the evolving role of AI-led preventive healthcare in India.



What inspired the launch of NURA, and why is preventive screening so central to your vision?

NURA was born from a very simple but powerful idea—healthcare should be fair. In Japan, preventive health check-ups are part of everyday life. Early detection allows cancers to be treated when they are still manageable and helps prevent serious cardiac events before they occur. However, when I spoke to friends and colleagues from India and other countries, I realised that this basic protection was not universally available. Many people only visit hospitals once they feel unwell. That sense of inequality motivated me to take Japan’s preventive screening culture to other parts of the world, starting with India.

Why did you choose India as the first market outside Japan?

India was a natural choice for several reasons. It has one of the largest populations globally and a rapidly growing demand for healthcare services. From Japan's perspective as well, India is a strategically important partner country. Fujifilm, which plays a major role in Japan's healthcare technology ecosystem, was encouraged to expand more actively in India. Beyond these factors, India has strong medical talent, increasing health awareness, and a real need for structured preventive care. All of this made India the right place to begin.

How has NURA been received in India so far?

The response has been very encouraging. Over the past four years, NURA has conducted more than 150,000 screenings globally, with India contributing a significant share. We see participation both from individuals and from corporate-sponsored wellness programmes. While affordability is an important consideration in India, our objective has never been premium positioning. The goal is to make comprehensive, high-quality preventive screening accessible to a broader population.

How many NURA centres are currently operational in India, and what are your expansion plans?

At present, we operate six NURA centres in India, including locations in Bengaluru, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bandra, and Calicut, along with a mobile screening unit. Bengaluru was our first centre. Looking ahead, we plan to expand into cities such as Chennai, Pune, Ahmedabad, and Kolkata. Over time, we also want to reach second- and third-tier cities, because preventive healthcare should not be limited to major metros.

How is NURA different from traditional diagnostic or health check-up centres in India?

Most diagnostic centres focus on organ-specific tests or symptomatic patients. NURA is fundamentally different because we specialise in whole-body, imaging-based screening for asymptomatic individuals. Our model combines cancer screening and metabolic screening, addressing lifestyle-related conditions such as heart disease and diabetes. Instead of offering fragmented checks, we aim to identify abnormalities anywhere in the body at a very early stage.

Why is the focus on asymptomatic individuals so important?

Hospitals are designed to treat people who are already sick, and that role is essential. At NURA, we invite people who feel healthy. If we detect any abnormality, we guide them to a hospital for further diagnosis and treatment. This clear separation—early detection at NURA and treatment at hospitals—can significantly improve outcomes and reduce long-term healthcare costs.

Can you explain why early detection is especially critical for diseases like cancer?

Many cancers do not produce symptoms in their early stages. A small cancer may not cause pain or discomfort, so people feel no reason to seek medical care. Once the disease grows and spreads, symptoms appear, and treatment becomes far more complex. If cancer is detected early, outcomes are dramatically better. For example, in breast cancer, detecting stage one disease results in nearly a 99 per cent survival rate. If it spreads, survival can drop to around 30 per cent. This is true everywhere—the human body is the same across countries.

What role does AI play in enabling this early detection?

AI is a support tool for doctors, not a replacement. Whole-body CT scans generate thousands of images, and manually reviewing them all carries the risk of fatigue, oversight, and delays. AI helps by highlighting areas that may require closer attention, allowing doctors to focus on potential abnormalities. Importantly, all final clinical decisions are made by trained physicians. AI improves efficiency, consistency, and accuracy, particularly as we scale across centres and countries.

What role does Fujifilm play in the NURA model?

Fujifilm provides approximately 80–90 per cent of the imaging and technology platforms used at NURA centres. Radiology and internal imaging are core strengths of Fujifilm. For areas outside our expertise—such as eye or hearing tests—we collaborate with specialised partners. However, for internal, non-invasive imaging and AI-enabled diagnostics, Fujifilm technology forms the backbone of our operations.

In Japan, NURA works closely with hospital networks. Why not integrate NURA directly into large hospital chains in India?

As a medical technology company, we already supply imaging equipment and tools to many hospitals in India, and several hospitals actively use our technology. However, hospitals primarily focus on treatment because they see large numbers of sick patients. NURA is designed specifically for preventive screening and asymptomatic individuals, which requires a different workflow, environment, and patient mindset.

In countries like Japan and Vietnam, preventive screening is supported by employers and governments. How does India compare?

In India, preventive screening is still largely voluntary. The healthcare system understandably prioritises diagnosis and treatment due to population size and capacity constraints. Government-supported prevention will take time. Rather than waiting, we chose to build centres independently,

How important are partnerships in NURA's global expansion strategy?

Partnerships are absolutely critical. With the right partner, we can navigate regulations, adapt the model, and establish centres together. Without them, operating in a new market is very difficult.

How do you see NURA's global expansion evolving over the next decade?

Today, we operate around 13–14 centres globally, including in Vietnam, Mongolia, UAE, South Africa, and Southeast Asia. Vietnam is particularly strong due to mandatory annual screening. Our long-term vision is ambitious—hundreds of centres by 2030 and eventually thousands worldwide, built step by step.

Do you see India playing a larger role in NURA's global strategy beyond screenings?

I am very interested in manufacturing medical equipment in India. If we can produce high-quality, affordable machines here, India can serve not only its own population but also emerging markets in Africa and the Middle East.

What message would you like to share with Indian consumers and healthcare leaders?

Preventive screening is not a luxury—it is protection. Many serious diseases show no symptoms in their early stages. Preventive care should be accessible in every city. That is the future NURA is working toward—a fairer healthcare system built on early detection.

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