

SPINEWS

THE SPINE FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

Spread the message

Dr Shekhar Bhojraj calls for volunteers to carry the torch of The Spine Foundation across the country.

I WANT TO take a moment to share some exciting developments regarding volunteering with The Spine Foundation. TSF has done extensive and impactful work across the state and country over the past 25 years. However, to enhance our efforts, we recognise the need for volunteers. One major challenge we face is spreading awareness about our free services to remote areas. Our centres are situated in well-known hospitals and NGOs, but it has been challenging to reach remote areas due to the lack of social media access. This is where volunteers become crucial—they can reach out to these communities, informing them about the free, expert care available nearby.

Initially, we considered using government networks like ASHA workers and community health volunteers. However, their work is primarily incentive-based, focusing on maternal and child care. While they appreciated our mission, they were reluctant to dedicate time to our cause without incentives. This highlighted the need for dedicated volunteers who could engage with communities, and establish trust regarding the safety and expertise of our services.

We began recruiting volunteers from areas surrounding our centres. For example, we initiated a program at Ambejogai Medical College, where medical students and interns help identify patients in remote areas and refer them to our spine centre. These volunteers travel to the interiors during their free time, helping bridge the gap between the community and our services.

In our grassroots effort, we host regular camps at different locations. Volunteers can join these camps to explore various aspects of our work and decide how they want to contribute. We can share the camp schedule and involve volunteers one at a time to ensure a focused and impactful experience.

Moreover, we welcome inputs from the IT community to enhance our social media presence and outreach efforts. We're exploring AI applications for community awareness, similar to how banks use automated calls for services. We aim to use AI to spread information and provide contact details for those in need.

Another innovative idea we're considering is establishing radio stations in certain areas. For instance, an NGO set up a radio station in



Purulia, West Bengal, to broadcast health programs in the local dialect. We saw a similar initiative at the Global Hospital in Mount Abu. These radio stations could be a powerful tool for spreading the word about our services.

We also plan to expand our volunteer network by reaching out to medical colleges, nursing colleges, physiotherapy colleges, and management institutes to recruit interested students. Management institutes like WE School, NIMS, and Tata Institute of Social Sciences could offer internship programs, allowing students to work with us and



participate in our camps.

Forming the TSF volunteer group is just the beginning of a significant effort, and I encourage you all to spread the word and start registering people who might be interested. Your involvement and ideas are invaluable as we continue to grow this initiative and make a more significant impact on communities in need.

Thank you for your support and enthusiasm!

A Beacon of Hope: Transforming Lives in Burundi

Els Reynaers, an environmental lawyer, an active member of the Rotary Club of Mumbai SOBO & well-wisher of TSF, takes us to the heart of Africa.



IN THE HEART of Sub-Saharan East Africa lies the small but breathtaking country of Burundi. Nestled among Rwanda, Tanzania, and Congo, Burundi's serene landscapes hide a pressing struggle: extreme poverty and a severe lack of medical resources. With a population of 12 million, the country primarily relies on subsistence agriculture, and its healthcare system is woefully inadequate. The nation has only one medical doctor for every 21,035 people and a shockingly low ratio of 0.18 surgeons per 100,000 inhabitants. Most alarmingly, there are no specialised spine surgeons in the country, leaving severe spinal conditions untreated.

The absence of spine surgeons in Burundi means that patients with serious spinal issues, such as paraplegia from accidents or congenital conditions like scoliosis, face a bleak future. Their only hope lies in the rare chance of international aid—a hope that seemed distant until a remarkable intervention unfolded.

A LIFELINE FROM INDIA

In November 2023, a ray of hope shone on Burundi when Indian spine surgeons, connected through the Rotary network, volunteered to visit. Among their first patients was Massa, a beautiful 5-year-old girl with early-onset scoliosis. Her condition threatened her lung growth and, ultimately, her lifespan. The Indian surgeons' successful intervention not only saved Massa's life but also ignited a spark of possibility for many others suffering in silence.

During their visit, the Indian surgeons were moved by the sight of numerous patients languishing in hospital beds, awaiting a miracle. Realising the profound need, they vowed to return and provide free surgeries to those in dire need. True to their word, in January 2024, they returned to Charitable Mutoyi Hospital, accompanied by a specialised physiotherapist. This visit saw five more patients undergo life-changing spine surgeries. Word spread quickly,

and soon, other hospitals were keen to send their patients for these transformative interventions.

THE BIRTH OF A STRUCTURED PROJECT

The overwhelming need for spine surgeries and rehabilitation in Burundi was clear. Recognising this, the Indian spine specialists proposed a structured project: an annual 5-day spine intervention camp. This initiative would allow them to perform around 20 spine surgeries per visit, based on pre-screening by local doctors at Mutoyi Hospital. Concurrently, a focused physiotherapy training program would be held, enhancing the skills of local physiotherapists and ensuring comprehensive post-surgery care.

THE ROLE OF ROTARY AND PARTNERS

Mutoyi Hospital, established in 1973 and known as a haven for the poorest patients, became the



project's focal point. Under the leadership of Dr. Sylvestre Bambara and Dr. Benjamin Morisho, the hospital committed to minimal or waived fees for the poorest patients. This ensures that life-changing surgeries are accessible to those who need them the most.

The Spine Foundation of India, led by the renowned Dr. Shekhar Bhojraj, extended its philosophy of serving the underserved to Burundi. A medical team flew from Mumbai to Burundi, including spine surgeons Dr. Abhay Nene and Dr. Harshal Bamb, anaesthesiologist Mansi Bapat, physiotherapist Shikha Jain, and Atul Shewale. The Indian team waived all professional fees, including for online follow-ups, embodying a spirit of altruism and dedication.

Three Rotary Clubs—Rotary Club of Bujumbura, Burundi; Rotary Club of Mumbai SOBO, India; and Rotary Club of Gand-Maritime, Belgium—were the driving forces of this project. Their global network and commitment to community service was instrumental in organising and coordinating the medical camps. They handled logistics, fundraising, and impact assessment, ensuring the project's smooth operation and sustainability. A special call out to Pierre De Vriendt, a Rotarian from Belgium whose wife is from Burundi; he hosted the entire team from India and was in charge of all the local logistics.

THE PATH FORWARD

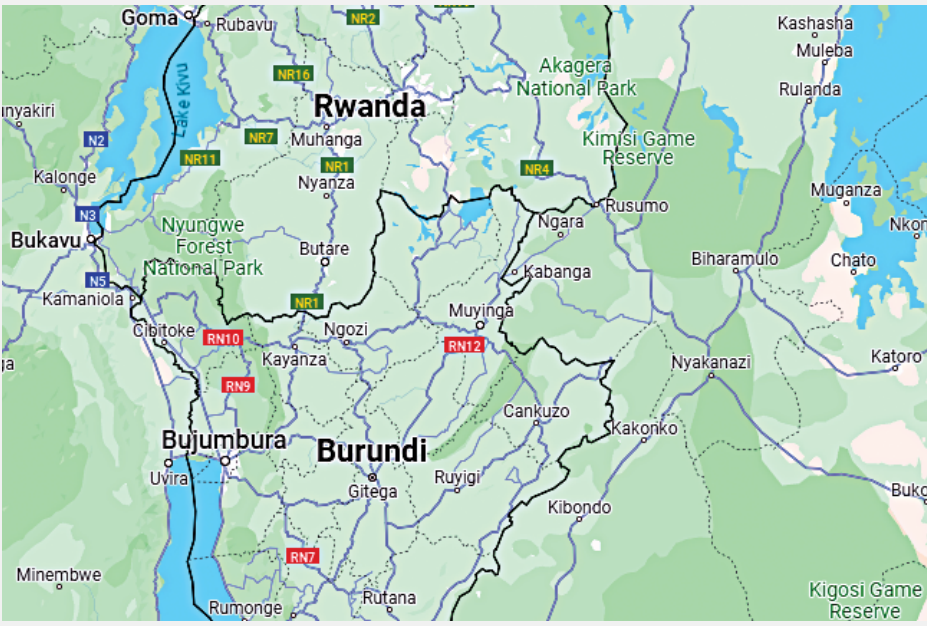
The next spine surgery camp is scheduled for December 2024, with the aim of treating 20 patients. Additional camps could be organised

depending on the funds raised, benefiting even more patients. The project's budget for the 5-day camp, covering travel, lodging, medical equipment, and implants, totals 26,000 (Rs. 23,40,000). This translates to 1,300 (Rs. 1,17,000) per patient.

TRANSFORMING LIVES, ONE SURGERY AT A TIME

Every donation towards this project is a step

towards giving patients a new lease on life. With continued support, the spine surgery camps will become a beacon of hope for Burundi's spine patients, enabling them to regain mobility, independence, and purpose. The determination of the treated patients, who are now attempting to walk with splints, is a testament to the project's life-changing impact. With compassion and collaboration, we can transform lives and create a healthier future for Burundi.



Putting Ranchi on the TSF map

Dr Nishant Kumar reminisces about how TSF and Dr Bhojraj steered his life.



DR NISHANT KUMAR is HOD and Director of spine surgery at Medifirst Hospital in Ranchi. Previously, he was an associate consultant at Breach Candy Wockhardt, Lilavati, and VN Desai in Mumbai. His initial spine training

began in 2013 with a comprehensive two-year session with Dr. Bhojraj. Following that, he spent a year in Singapore on a scholarship sponsored by the National University of Singapore, three months of training in Cardiff, United Kingdom, and a month of training in spinal endoscopy surgery in Germany. Additionally, he completed four months of intensive scoliosis training in South Korea.

Dr Nishant Kumar has 12 international publications in the field of spine surgery and was awarded a scholarship from the Scoliosis Research Society, the largest research society in the USA. After completing his studies, he moved to Mumbai to work with Dr. Bhojraj and gain a deeper understanding of The Spine Foundation. During his fellowship, he was exposed to various societal aspects, treating both urban and rural populations, including underprivileged individuals, and ensuring they received the same quality of care as everyone else. He has experience in managing

rural programs for The Spine Foundation in India from 2017 to 2019, overseeing programs in several rural centres, including Gadchiroli, Ratnagiri, Akola, Ambajogai, Nandurbar, and Sittilingi.

Upon returning from his training abroad, Dr Nishant Kumar sought to learn more from Dr. Bhojraj about reaching underserved communities and providing assistance, particularly in the eastern region. With this objective, he moved to Ranchi. He noticed that spine treatment was not common and often went undiagnosed due to social taboos about spine surgeries not being successful. Consequently, people had to travel to big cities for spine surgeries, which was an expensive endeavour.

Dr Nishant Kumar had the idea to start services with The Spine Foundation with himself as one of the initiators in eastern India to take this program forward. After several meetings with the health ministry, he secured

an MOU with The Spine Foundation and the Jharkhand health department in Ranchi, where he currently practices. They started their services in the government medical college (GMC), one of the oldest colleges in the region and the only postgraduate teaching centre in the state. He initiated a weekly OPD, devoting his personal time on Mondays from 8:30 AM to 1:30 PM to treat and diagnose patients. For patients who didn't see improvement with medicine or rehabilitation, he would thoroughly assess their condition and discuss the option of surgery as a potential solution, aiming to address any concerns stemming from prior negative experiences with surgery. They held several OPD sessions and invited Dr. Bhojraj to give talks on lower back pain and to collaborate with the government medical college to advance this program. In the first phase of surgeries, they successfully operated on three interesting cases, and all patients recovered well.

Subsequently, they performed four successful surgeries in the next camp. These cases were selected from the 700 to 900 patients seen during his regular Monday OPD, specifically focusing on spinal deformities such as S-shaped, V-shaped, or humps on the back, which were previously deemed untreatable. Unfortunately, their progress was interrupted by the Covid pandemic. When they attempted to restart the program after the pandemic, they encountered challenges due to changes in the government administration. Despite facing bureaucratic obstacles, Dr Nishant Kumar remains determined to continue serving the Eastern region with the strong support of The Spine Foundation.

He has been engaged in charitable work and has collaborated with government initiatives to ensure patients do not have to bear extra expenses. Over the past three years, he has performed approximately 400 to 450 complex surgeries, with all patients faring well due to the techniques he learned from his mentor, Dr Bhojraj, and his training abroad. Although the government centre has not materialised, the positive feedback has led to an influx of patients seeking affordable treatment at his hospital. They continue to perform surgeries using government schemes, and when there are gaps in funding, The Spine Foundation steps in to assist. They have also started a program in Purulia, an underprivileged area on the border of West Bengal and Jharkhand. They conducted a medical camp in collaboration with an NGO, examining around 250 patients and identifying five who required surgeries. The Spine Foundation sponsored their MRI scans. The program is in the planning phase, and they hope to proceed soon, pending the completion of local festivals and elections. The Rotary Hospital in Purulia has approved their program.

The next program will be in Ambikapur, originally in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh. It is just a 3-4 hour drive from Ranchi. Dr. Bhojraj is confident of running this project, and Dr Nishant Kumar is always there to support the foundation. Ambikapur is the third project planned in the eastern part of India, with feasibility studies completed and paperwork in progress. Camps and surgeries will soon be organised there. Their focus is on three states in the eastern part of India: Jharkhand, West



Bengal, and Chhattisgarh. They are seeing increased awareness and outreach; their goal is to assist more people through this program.

Regarding Ranchi, why move there after training in Mumbai? In eastern Indian villages, there is poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and a lack of awareness about spine surgeries, along with social taboos and a general lack of expertise and super-specialty care. Spine surgery is expensive, long-term, and may lead to disability and require extended bed rest. However, after the initial results, things progressed well.

Why The Spine Foundation and why Dr. Bhojraj? After his postgraduate program, Dr Nishant Kumar was unsure which super speciality to pursue. Dr Avinash Kulate, his guide and mentor during his three years of residency, suggested spine surgery, noting the lack of training for orthopaedic surgeons in this speciality. Dr. Bhojraj conveyed that

spine surgery is an upcoming field that would be beneficial in the long run. After interviews, Dr Nishant Kumar chose Dr. Bhojraj due to his two-year intensive training program and positive feedback from his colleague, Dr. Priyank Patel, who was already working with the unit. Dr. Bhojraj analyses and selects students based on their understanding. During the two-year program, they experience various scenarios, reach out to different people, and understand the economic status of patients who need proper treatment and care. The key objective of this program is to serve the rural areas of India, where proper treatment is lacking. Besides private practice, Dr Nishant Kumar believes it is important to give back to society and dedicate time to it for the satisfaction and happiness it brings.

"As we look ahead into the next century, leaders will be those who empower others." - Bill Gates

The Spine Foundation & The Shrimad Rajchandra Hospital & Research Centre: A win-win partnership

Dr Gautam Zaveri, Director Spine Surgery, Jaslok Hospital & Research Centre, Mumbai, Consultant Spine Surgeon, Reliance Foundation & Zen Hospitals, Mumbai



THE SPINE FOUNDATION team gathered at Bombay Central Station at 5:30 am on a Saturday morning to catch the Vande Bharat train to Vapi. Two hours later, they arrived at Vapi station and took taxis to Dharampur, a town in the Valsad district of South Gujarat, 25 km from Valsad city. The town has a rich history dating back to 1262 CE when it was founded as Ramnagar by Maharana Ramsinh of the Sisodia Rajputs. In 1764, King Dharamdevji founded present-day Dharampur.

Shrimad Rajchandra (Param Krupaludev), a Jain poet-philosopher and spiritual leader, spent around 35 days in meditation and discourses at Dharampur in 1900. The Shrimad Rajchandra Mission, founded to preach and spread the philosophy and teachings of Param Krupalu Dev, has established its international headquarters, the Shrimadh Rajchandra Ashram, on over 223 acres of land on the outskirts of Dharampur. The Mission has been serving the underprivileged sections of society since 2000, starting with providing healthcare to the tribal and rural population of South Gujarat. A hospital was initiated in Dharampur in 2004. In 2022, the Mission commissioned The Shrimad Rajchandra Hospital & Research Centre, a new 250-bed, multi-specialty, charitable facility near the Ashram, which has treated over 2 million patients. The hospital performs a range of surgeries at a fraction of the cost of private hospitals under government schemes such as Ayushman Bharat and Mukhyamantri Amrutum Yojana, providing much-needed medical care to the tribal population.

Upon reaching the hospital, the team of doctors screened pre-operative patients, provided counselling, and prepared them for surgery. The physiotherapy team from The Spine Foundation set up a mobile physiotherapy unit to examine patients with back and neck problems in villages and initiate treatment. The unit also identifies patients with serious complaints and refers them to the outpatient clinic of Dr Tirtesh Rana, the full-time



orthopaedic surgeon at the Shrimad Rajchandra Hospital. The administrative team from The Spine Foundation went into neighbouring villages to raise awareness about spinal problems and meet patients operated on in previous camps.

Generally, the team performs 10-12 surgeries in three operation theatres by about 7 pm on Saturday. Commonly performed surgeries include decompression surgery for nerve compression due to lumbar disc prolapse or lumbar canal stenosis and fusion surgery for spondylolisthesis. Cervical spine surgeries have also been performed. Over the past six years, the Spine Foundation team has performed over 250 surgeries in Dharampur, all free of cost to the patients. Thanks to the blessings of Gurudevshri, since 2018, all surgeries have been without complications, and patients have experienced significant improvement. On Sundays, the team starts performing surgeries at 7 am, followed by patient rounds and outpatient clinic evaluations.

The partnership between The Spine Foundation and The Shrimad Rajchandra Hospital & Research Centre demonstrates how specialised healthcare can be extended to remote areas in India without compromising quality. The immediate goal of this partnership is

to bring spine care to Dharampur. The long-term goal is to make the hospital and region self-sufficient in identifying and managing various spinal ailments. With this in mind, ASHA workers are trained to identify basic spinal problems in villages and refer patients to the hospital when basic treatment does not suffice. As most common spine problems can be treated with simple exercises, the mobile physiotherapy unit is instrumental in providing essential care to the villages.

The hospital trustees and administration have made significant efforts to arrange extra

anaesthetists, operation theatre, and outpatient staff to ensure the smooth and efficient conduct of the camp. They have also invested in a set of specialised spine instruments. The young and dynamic team of lady anaesthetists is always ready to go the extra mile to accommodate our patients. The operation theatre staff efficiently runs 5 to 6 operation theatres simultaneously with a smile.

One of the highlights of our trips to Dharampur is the delicious food that we are served. The Vande Bharat offers a very wholesome breakfast. The kela samosas, pizzas, grilled sandwiches, and the cool, refreshing nimbu pani served by the hospital cafeteria are outstanding. The evening usually ends at one of the many dhabas that line the Mumbai-Ahmedabad highway, enjoying Kathiawadi delicacies such as ringna no odo, sev-tamatar nu shaak, rotla nu vagharelu shaak followed by the American dry fruit ice cream in the Dharampur town square.

As the train chugs its way back to Mumbai Central Station, the team members, though exhausted, have a warm glow within knowing that they have contributed their bit towards improving the lives of fellow humans. "Where there is a will, there is a way!"

Serving at the bottom of the pyramid and other memories.

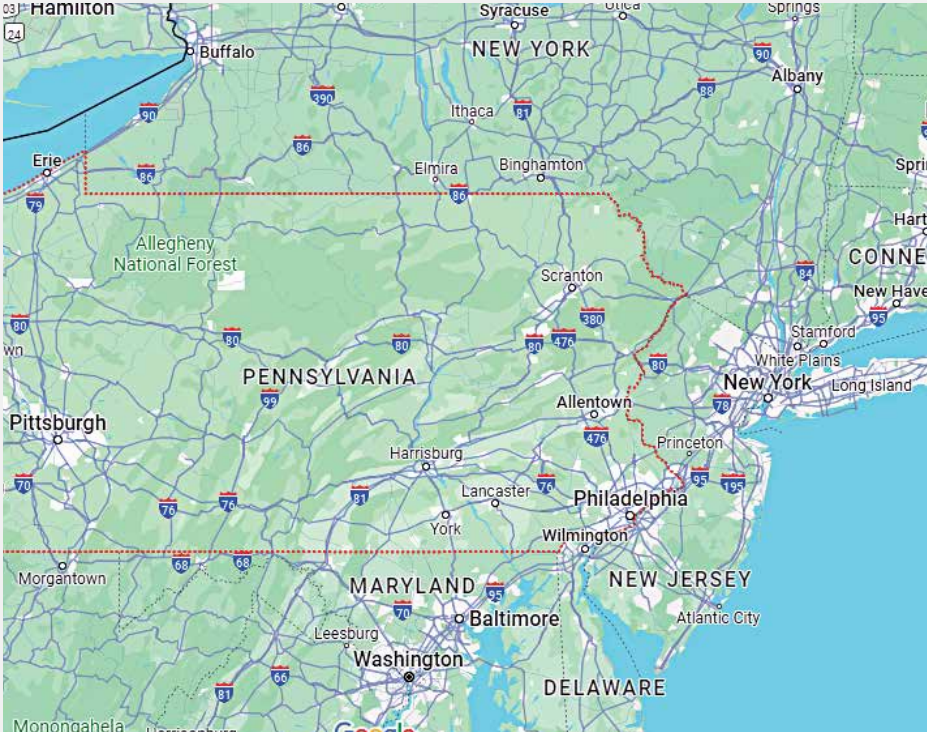
Dr Siddharth A Badve shares memories of his long medical journey, including the first surgical camp in Gadchiroli.



AS WE EVOLVE, some of us strive hard to find a purpose. A purpose is not just to pursue one's life's goals but to go beyond and contribute to the well-being of society. Those who want to walk this high road must find a mentor, a 'True Guru'. As I climbed up my career ladder to be a medical doctor, then an orthopaedic surgeon and eventually a spine surgeon, I was fortunate to be taken under the wings of Dr Shekhar Bhojraj early on. This is when I had just completed my orthopaedic residency training from the prestigious Seth GS Medical and King Edward Memorial Hospital, Mumbai and was a newly appointed Assistant Professor in Orthopedic Surgery at TN Medical College & BYL Nair Hospital. I realised that I had found my purpose and my mentor.

I come from the small town of Malegaon, located in northern Maharashtra. Coming from a prominent family of doctors and other members with a long track record of involvement in public welfare activities, giving back to those in need was a way of life. I moved to Mumbai to further my career path and achieved major professional and academic milestones. But deep inside me, I felt the need to do something for the greater good of society. I also had the wonderful opportunity to know the Bhojraj family and their illustrious work in education and philanthropy. My involvement in the Spine Foundation under the mentorship of Dr Bhojraj introduced me to a new world of service, philanthropy and academic excellence.

While attaining greater professional milestones, the realisation of my responsibility to give back to society was getting stronger. I regularly participated in The Spine Foundation camps and the awareness drives in the different professional meetings. The opportunity to participate in the surgical camps at different places in rural Maharashtra or the Naxal-affected areas of Gadchiroli helped me evolve as an empathetic human being and a responsible team member. My position as a faculty member in a major public hospital in Mumbai and my association with The Spine Foundation gave me



a unique opportunity to help numerous needy patients and organise academic activities to influence budding orthopaedic surgeons.

My wife, Dr Manasi Badve Ambardekar, is an active participant herself. She enthusiastically contributed as an active member of the Spine Foundation activities, whether it was the Gadchiroli surgical camp or as an anesthetist for the VN Desai Spine unit. The association with the Spine Foundation provided us with unique insight into life and enriched us both individually and professionally.

As we moved to the United States of America to fulfil our career goals, we missed being closely involved with the Spine Foundation's activities. I maintain a close link with the foundation and have tracked how it has blossomed with the development of centres across India. As I move towards the next phase of my professional life, the plan is to increase my involvement in TSF work incrementally.

As to sharing some of my most memorable experiences, knowing Dr Abhay and Rani Bang and the phenomenal work being done was a unique achievement. I also remember being part of the first surgical camp at Gadchiroli. The patient was bleeding profusely, and the electro-cautery was not working. Dr Bhojraj and Dr Nene, my other mentor, were operating and I was the second assistant. The nearest blood bank was three and a half hours away at Chandrapur. I had to break scrubs and get out to fix the cautery. Despite all the efforts, the electrocautery was not ready to behave. I had to

innovate, fix the cautery connection, and hold it during the surgery. It was still an enjoyable experience, and I doubled up as a DJ playing music on Dr Nene's Dell laptop.

I will always treasure my time with the TSF team. From the valuable insights shared by Dr Bhojraj and Dr. Nene, to the great camaraderie with Raghu, Sheetal, Shailesh, Sameer, Ankur, and Premik, as well as the experiences I shared with Tarush, Gautam, Aditya, and other colleagues. The research meetings, the dinners, the outings and the other events were always enriching and offered a vibrant perspective early on in my professional odyssey.

As I look back to my association with TSF, I often get inspired to foresee a future where one can give back to society's have-nots, offering hope for access to affordable but high-quality healthcare to those at the bottom of the pyramid.

Although my introduction to the TSF family was serendipity, the continued association has been inspirational and gratifying, and the future holds immense promise.

Dr Siddharth A. Badve is an Orthopedic Spine Surgeon based in State College, Pennsylvania, USA. He is affiliated with the Division of Spine Surgery, Geisinger Musculoskeletal Institute, and is also an Assistant Professor in Orthopedic Surgery at the Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine, Pennsylvania, USA. He has been affiliated with the Spine Foundation team activities since 2006.

Bridging Global Expertise and Philanthropy in Spinal Care

Dr Prasad Karpe discusses how the NHS in the UK and TSF in India help reduce health disparities among different socio-economic groups.



AS A SPINE surgeon, I am often asked about my job and the rewarding moments that make it all worthwhile. This article aims to provide a glimpse into that.

Having completed my orthopaedic residency in Goa and a spine fellowship at Sancheti Hospital in Pune, I pursued specialised training at The Spine Foundation from 2008 to 2009. A part of my training exposed me to providing high-quality medical care to underprivileged individuals with severe spinal issues. In 2010, I moved to the United Kingdom for further training and to complete my orthopaedic training at Northeast Deanery, one of the most esteemed training centres in the country. During my training, I rotated through the Royal Victoria Infirmary in Newcastle and James Cook University Hospital in Middlesbrough, gaining expertise in complex spine surgery. I

then completed a dedicated one-year paediatric spinal fellowship at the renowned Great Ormond Street Hospital in London, a leading referral centre for complex spinal conditions worldwide.

I am a full-time spinal consultant at James Cook University Hospital in Middlesbrough and the University Hospital of North Tees in Stockton-on-Tees, England. I specialise in paediatric and adult spines and bring my knowledge and experience to my current role.

In line with The Spine Foundation's vision, I travelled with the team to surgery camps at Rural Spine Care Centres in remote locations of Gadchiroli in March 2024. During this time, I was part of a surgical team that operated on 26 patients over three days. The impact of the charity camp extends far beyond the operating room. By restoring mobility and alleviating pain, these surgeries dramatically improve the quality of life for patients. Many recipients regain their ability to work, engage in daily activities, and support their families, thus fostering positive change within their communities.

The planning and safe execution of spine surgeries undertaken during this time are remarkable and comparable to the best centres I have worked at in the UK, even though this is a rural setup. There is a lot of positive energy and happiness at these camps, something that will make me return.

I am also helping to set up the same model at Hospicio Hospital in Goa, where I am originally from. The Spine Foundation has given me a unique opportunity to embrace a philanthropic role, using my expertise to benefit underserved communities and address global health

disparities. I have learned much from these camps - the patients, other team members, and SEARCH, Gadchiroli.

Health disparities between rural and urban settings and between wealthy and impoverished communities are critical issues affecting the well-being and quality of life of millions worldwide. While prevalent to some degree in the West, these disparities arise from a complex interplay of socioeconomic, environmental, and healthcare access factors. It's crucial that we all, as a global community, remain committed to addressing these disparities and ensuring that everyone, regardless of their background or location, has access to quality healthcare.

Working in the UK, the NHS offers healthcare to all UK residents, ensuring everyone has access to medical services regardless of their ability to pay. Patients do not have to pay for most healthcare services, including doctor visits, hospital stays, surgeries, and emergency care. In other words, this helps reduce health disparities among different socio-economic groups.

The Spine Foundation, founded by Dr. Shekhar Bhojraj, recognised the significant inequality in access to specialised spinal care for people at the bottom of the pyramid. It serves as a bridge, bringing together a team of skilled doctors, surgeons, and medical experts dedicated to delivering quality spinal care. The journey is as humbling as it is inspiring, as each procedure alleviates pain, restores mobility, instils hope and renews lives. By collaborating with dedicated volunteers and healthcare professionals, we address the challenges of limited resources and logistical constraints to ensure that every patient receives quality care.

At India's first rural medical college: Memories from the ground

Dr Sheetal Mohite shares his experience at Swami Ramanand Teerth Rural Medical College in Ambajogai.



AMBAJOGAI IS A tehsil in Beed district. It is also known as the cultural capital of Marathwada. It is named Ambajogai after Goddess Yogeshwari (also known as Jogai), and its heritage temple is located here. Many years ago, the town served as a military base for the Hyderabad state army, and interestingly, the stable of horses of the Hyderabad army cavalry was turned into a hospital and medical college.

The medical college and hospital, originally a part of the Hyderabad state army, was renamed Swami Ramanand Teerth Rural Medical College (SRTRMC) in honour of Swami Ramanand Teerth, a respected freedom fighter. This institution, with its rich history and unique status as Asia's first rural medical college, is a source of pride for all associated with it.

In 2016, The Spine Foundation, under the aegis of Dr SY Bhojraj, decided to expand its outreach to the underprivileged after tasting tremendous success at SEARCH in Gadchiroli.

It was a matter of great irony that the place that was the first Rural Medical College of Asia and is so very near the developed city of Latur was not performing Spine Surgery but instead referring the needy to higher centres. The Orthopaedic department, run by Dr Burande and Dr Lamture, was eager to change this trend and help us start this project.

After holding a two-day CME workshop and sensitising the local doctors and physiotherapists about the intent and work pattern of The Spine Foundation, we were assured of cooperation from the Dean of Medical College and the hospital and its various departments, i.e., Orthopaedic, Anesthesia, Physiotherapy, Medicine, Operation Theater staff, and the hospital Medical social worker unit.

The successful strategy of promoting the spine camp through social media, banners, and leaflets, as well as events, resulted in a large influx of patients in need. This reinforced our decision to select Ambajogai SRTRMC as one of our outreach centers.

The whole Surgery team travels to Ambajogai



by overnight train to Latur and then by road (about 50 km) to Ambajogai. As soon as we reach SRTRMC, we have four operation theatres ready. The patients have been screened at pick-up camps or filtered at Spine OPD at SRTRMC and have been medically optimised, and plans for surgery are discussed with us and finalised on email/WhatsApp before our arrival. On average, we perform about 10 to 12 surgeries per visit. The team returns to Latur to catch the overnight train to Mumbai till we return in three or four months. To this date, we have performed over 120 successful spine surgeries.

Dr Lamture, a very dedicated, sincere and hard-working professor in Orthopaedics at SRTRMC, showed keen interest in Spine Surgery and came down to Mumbai for a couple of weeks to observe and learn the finer details of Spine Surgery with Dr SY Bhojraj and team. He returned to start a Spine OPD at SRTRMC and has even begun performing basic Spine surgeries. This has always been the aim of Spine Foundation, i.e., to teach the local team to do what is needed and move on to help improve a new centre.

Seeing the Spine Foundation's dedication to its social work, one generous donor, who prefers to remain anonymous, wished to

foot the expenses of setting up a state-of-the-art modular Operation Theater. This theatre is now used exclusively for Spine and Joint replacement surgeries.

Swami Ramanand Teerth Rural Medical College and Hospital remains a huge success story for the Spine Foundation in its attempt to serve the needy and underprivileged. As a team, we are fortunate to have been a part of this endeavour and truly are blessed to be a part of an organisation that believes in giving back to society.

Art in Ahmedabad

Dr Tarak Patel, Dr Tejasvi Agarwal, Dr Bharat Sarkar and Dr Priyank Patel join Dr Shekhar Bhojraj in exhibiting their art at Kanoria Centre in Ahmedabad.

THE KANORIA CENTRE for Arts at the CEPT campus in Ahmedabad was established in 1984. It is an institution that has been associated with the luminaries of Indian art like the Late BV Doshi, MF Hussain, Bhupen Khakhar, Mrinalini Sarabhai, Anjolie Ela Menon, Lalitha Lajmi and many more. On 24th and 25th February 2024, the Urmila Gallery at Kanoria witnessed a different breed of artists who spend more hours wielding a scalpel than a brush. The Spine

Foundation was holding its sixth art exhibition to raise awareness about its activities. After Mumbai, Pune, Kolkata and Kolhapur, the exhibition had now travelled to Ahmedabad. However, this time, it was not just Dr Shekhar Bhojraj who had put up his art, but also other doctors from TSF. This included Dr Tarak Patel, who founded the IndoSpine Hospital in Ahmedabad, Dr Tejasvi Agarwal, Dr Bharat Sarkar and Dr Priyank Patel. As usual, the money

generated by this exhibition also went to The Spine Foundation, which offers free spine treatment and surgery to the underprivileged. The visitors to the gallery were not only pleasantly surprised at the artistry of these specialist surgeons but also happy to learn about the work being done to make quality spine care accessible to everyone.



Lighting of the lamp by Dr Raghuprasad Varma



L to R: Dr Nene, Dr Priyank, Dr Varma, Dr Bhojraj, Dr Tarak, Mrs Bhojraj, Dr Nagad



TSF staff who work behind the scenes, with Dr Bhojraj



Dr Tarak Patel engages with some art lovers



"Art is not a thing, it is a way"



The TSF team behind the exhibition poses for the camera at the end of the day



Dr Tejasvi Agarwal along with his wife, poses in front of his art



They say medicine is as much art as a science



The next Amrita Sher-Gil?



"Art is not what you see, but what you make others see" -- Edgar Degas



TSF founder, Dr Shekhar Bhojraj signs his artbook 'Mindscapes' for a donor



Dr Bhojraj's artbook 'Photo, Paint & Pen' was much appreciated



As Picasso said, every child is an artist



The two Patels – Dr Priyank and Dr Tarak



A few moments to reflect before the doors open



Discussion on art? Or the latest in surgery?



Dr Tarak Patel's patients see his artist avtaar.



Dr Bhojraj engages with a curious art lover



Over a hundred photos, paintings and sketches on display



Dr Bhojraj and Mrs Bhojraj



Friends and colleagues amongst visitors



Trustees of The Spine Foundation in attendance at A'bad



An enraptured visitor checks out the paintings



Reflect. Contemplate. Absorb.



DR TARAK PATEL

Despite his busy schedule as a top spine surgeon and the founder of IndoSpine Hospital in Ahmedabad, Dr Patel makes time to pursue his art. He wields the brush with as much dexterity as he wields a scalpel.

