

SPINEWS

THE SPINE FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

Rahul's journey from darkness to light

Dr Gaurish Kenkre, who heads the foundation's rehab team talks about a young man's successful expedition from bed to feet



IN 2019, RAHUL was diagnosed with Koch's Spine. In simple words, tuberculosis of the spine that could lead to paralysis. It was a devastating blow for the 23-year old. The

government hospital he was admitted in, started AKT treatment. However, his condition continued to deteriorate and he suffered from flexor spasms. The disease progressed to Fixed Flexion Deformity in both his lower limbs. The deformity was rock solid; Rahul could now no longer even sit or lie down on his back. He was bed-ridden. In desperation, Rahul's family consulted a spine specialist. However since the family could not afford expensive private treatment, he was referred to the VN Desai Hospital in Mumbai where The Spine Foundation runs a spine unit for cases just like him.

When Rahul was evaluated on admission, we discovered that there was an urgent need to reduce FFD if he was ever to walk again. The Spine Foundation team was up to the challenge and determined to put this young man back on his feet. We came up with a plan of action that involved use of manipulation under general anaesthesia followed by plaster



Rahul's legs before manipulation, taking him in the MRI machine was impossible but this correction in the deformity also made the MRI possible. This revealed a major important finding of cord involvement along with D8-L1 myelitis.

After the removal of the plaster cast it was again the job of the rehabilitation team to make Rahul stand on his feet. We started a series of programs that involved strengthening, stretching and trunk training. However, we soon realised that further orthopaedic intervention was required. The patient underwent a right and left femoral osteotomy with plating and the FFD was corrected to a larger degree. Thereafter, the battle for completion of race from bed to feet was handed back to the rehab team. We took up the challenge and charted out a recovery program that slowly showed improvements as Rahul conquered new milestones. From standing with a Walker and Splints to walking without Splints till finally he was able to walk with minimal assistance. Rahul had completed the arduous voyage from bed to feet and is on the road to recovery. The fate of this young man was rewritten by the prompt



professional and financial support provided by The Spine Foundation. Without this, Rahul would have been left crippled with a poor quality of life. We are proud that The Spine Foundation could put Rahul back on his feet without burying him and his family under the inevitable financial burden.

casting. This plan of action achieved a 90-90 position of the legs; and the milestones like independently sitting at the edge of the bed, lying down flat on his back were accomplished. As there was severe FFD in

Serving the bottom of the pyramid

THE SPINE FOUNDATION has a long association with Gadchiroli and Society for Education, Action and Research in Community Health (SEARCH) founded by Padma Shri Dr Anand Bang and Padma Shri Dr Rani Bang. The Spine Foundation conducted its first rural spine surgery at a camp at Gadchiroli in 2007. It has been a regular visitor to this tribal dominated area ever since. The Spine



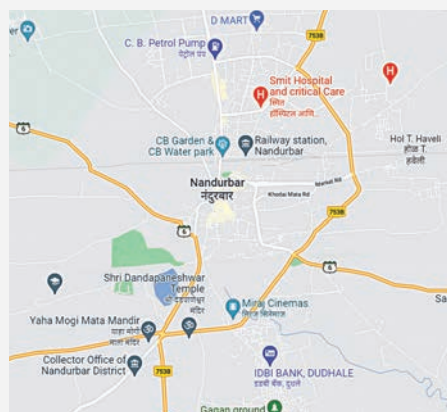
Foundation continued this tradition on 27 December, 2022 where six patients were operated upon and 10 OPD patients received non-surgical treatment.

The pioneering work being done here to bring medical care to the bottom of the pyramid serves as a beacon of hope and source of inspiration.



10 surgeries in 12 hours

THE SPINE FOUNDATION conducted 10 complex spine surgeries in 12-hours at the Government Medical College and Hospital in Nandurbar on 16th October 2021. It included one tandem, two cervical spines and one fixation. The beneficiaries were tribals and poor patients from Nandurbar and surrounding areas. It was made possible thanks to the efforts of Dr Sanjay Gavit and his team at the civil hospital and the Lions Club of Nandurbar with Dr Mahajan and Dr Patel and others. Dr Shekhar Bhojraj gave a sensitisation talk about NIRMAN, an initiative to identify, nurture and organise the young change makers to solve various societal challenges, to 1st year MBBS students of GMC Nandurbar.



Reaching out through art

WHILE DR SHEKHAR Bhojraj is known for his professional achievements, not many know about his creative accomplishments. An active artist since his university days, he has recently been using his art to spread the message of The Spine Foundation. While he has held solo shows in Mumbai, Pune and Kolkata, this time he decided to join a group show. The Doctors' Art Exhibition was held at Nehru Centre in Mumbai from 7th to 13th December. It showcased the artistic talent of 40 highly reputed doctors. The Spine Foundation had set up a desk at the exhibition so that the hundreds of visitors who came to appreciate the art, also walked out with a bigger appreciation of the work done by the foundation.



Every life matters

DID YOU KNOW that Kolhapur is known as 'Dakshin Kashi' due to its spiritual history and antiquity? The Spine Foundation travelled to Kolhapur to hold a surgical camp at the Dr DY Patil Hospital & Research Centre on 18th September 2021. The team from Mumbai comprised of Dr Shekhar Bhojraj, Dr Premik Nagad, Dr Harikrishnan, Dr Piyush Gadegone, Roshan Kule, Sagar Ghade and Mahesh Palan. They were joined by Dr Tushar Deore and Dr Hrushukesh Mehta from Pune. Five poor patients were operated upon for free, including a young school girl with complex case of spinal deformity (scoliosis).

Dr Bhojraj also spoke on the topic of 'How to take care of your spine' at the Keshavrao Bhonsle auditorium the same evening to a packed house.



UPCOMING RURAL SURGICAL CAMPS

NANDURBAR – 19TH FEB 2022
KOLHAPUR – 25TH FEB 2022
GADCHIROLI – 12TH MARCH 2022

Top 10 unique things about The Spine Foundation

Dr Shekhar Bhojraj, the founder Trustee of the organisation, puts spotlight on some of the things that make it one of the most unique experiments in affordable medical care.



1 Surgeries at grassroots by experts:

The Spine Foundation gives even the poorest patients in the remotest parts of the country, access to the same top doctors and surgeons who treat the country's leaders – industrialists, politicians, sportsmen, film stars and other rich and famous. These doctors have donated their time and expertise to The Spine Foundation to fulfil their social responsibility.

2 Go to the patients:

Rather than wait for the patients to come to us, the The Spine Foundation team reaches out to identify and seek out spine patients from far and deep within the country, from places where there is no access to even primary health care, leave aside spine care.

3 Zero-cost to poor patients:

The entire treatment is completely independent of the



paying capacity of the patient and nobody is ever refused. Each case is treated on its merits and prioritised depending on its severity and urgency with zero considerations of affordability at each stage. Even the poorest of the poor can now have access to quality spine care.

4 Funded by goodwill:

Since the The Spine Foundation doesn't charge the patients any fees and the professional expertise is also offered completely free (no professional fees charged whatsoever) the expenses of the running projects are completely borne by the funds available at The Spine Foundation. These funds are raised by donations from well wishers, philanthropists and from happy rich patients from the urban community as well as the CSR of corporate houses. The sensitisation and awareness of the The Spine Foundation work is made possible by word of

mouth as well as the special efforts of our team through social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc) , literature, newsletters, and events.

5 Comprehensive spine care:
Spine care includes everything, starting from identifying the ailing patients, clinically evaluating them, getting them investigated and treating them with medicines, rehabilitation advise and if necessary admissions and surgery.

6 Proven & conservative treatment:
The treatment heavily relies on time tested treatment protocols and focuses majorly on conservative measures and rehabilitation options. Rather than transplanting expensive, imported solutions, The Spine Foundation adopts indigenous and proven methods to bring quality spine care to all.

7 5-Filter system:
The Spine Foundation has developed a 5-level filter system of spine care starting at the grassroots level by the village health workers (CHW/ VHW /Asha workers) and ending at the tertiary spine care centre in the big metros. With PHCs, district hospitals, civil hospitals, medical colleges in the 2 and 3 tier cities forming the intermediate filters. There is a constant effort to train them and upgrade their expertise to empower them to work on these filters at all stages to reduce the pore size and make them more effective and efficient. This way, less and less patients reach the next filter thereby minimising the need for more and more specialists.

8 Rural Spine Care Centres:
The Spine Foundation is developing Rural Spine Care Centres at the grassroots to reach poor patients in the remote parts of India. As there are no trained personnel available here, Voluntary Health Workers and Community Health Workers are being educated and trained to red-flag the more serious cases as well as deliver simple remedies and rehabilitation measures. This empowerment is the key to the long term success of these RSCCs of The Spine Foundation. The typical RSCC models include – regular pick up clinics run locally, a red flag OPD of selected cases, getting investigations of short-listed patients, visit by The Spine Foundation team to perform surgeries and after care.

9 Multiplying effect of telemedicine:
Most of the red-flag OPDs are presently being conducted online on a weekly basis with top notch senior spine consultants from The Spine Foundation offering their expert advice and opinions online. The local hosting teams can be a NGO with camp activities, a civil hospital with an interested local civil surgeon or a medical college orthopaedic department with their orthopaedic surgeons coordinating with The Spine Foundation teams.

10 OPD for poor patients in Mumbai:
At the VN Desai Municipal Hospital unit of The Spine Foundation a full fledged OPD clinic is run every alternate day and poor patients are admitted and treated conservatively or surgically on a regular daily or biweekly basis.



Why do we do this?

Dr Abhay Nene, a Trustee of The Spine Foundation on doctors who make a difference.

WITH POWER, comes responsibility. As medical graduates trained in the public hospitals in India, our doctors have been exposed to the most extreme forms of poverty. To see poor families scampering for resources to treat their elders, parents running around trying to raise funds to avail even very basic medications for their children and the homeless poor suffering because of non availability of health care services, is soul stirring to say the least.

In medical school, it was not uncommon to see an intern shell out his Rs.2000 salary so that a roadside dweller with a fracture in hit-and-run can buy a plaster. Or an honorary consultant sign out a cheque to pay the entire medical bill for an old abandoned grandfather who needed an emergency appendectomy. Sensitivity towards the poor, you would agree, is at the core of our training. And hence, deeply ingrained in every Indian doctor's heart.

IF ALL DOCTORS COME FROM THE SAME BACKGROUND, THEN WHY DON'T ALL DOCTORS ENGAGE IN ACTIVE CHARITY?

This noble profession, unfortunately, suffers from a huge downtime before any mentionable monetary returns start to come in. Our non-medical contemporaries start getting a decent salary a good 8-10 years before us. This pressure drives many amongst us to dive into private practice with a single aim of treating patients in their specialty, growing in reputation and doing good work with the obvious returns. It takes at least 10-years of hard work to start getting into the zone. By that time you're in your 40s, you are practising with a vengeance, and this becomes your goal, your addiction and your high. And then, there is no time available for 'social work', and you miss that bus.

ACTIVATING THE SWITCH OF SOCIAL WORK.

The commitment to spend time and effort in contributing to the society, to the service of the poor, has to come early; in the prime time of your career. It is never a chance occurrence but a meaningful, well thought about, structured proactive change, that requires significant sacrifices of time, money and career and a redeployment of goals. Role models and mentors can make the definitive difference to a young doctor's thought process. Luckily, we in The Spine Foundation, found the most stellar example of this in Dr Shekhar Bhojraj.

GIVING IS EASY.

One of the greatest privileges of being a medical professional is the ease with which you can give back to society. You need not build homes or hospitals, you need not donate large amounts of money, you need



not buy expensive equipment. You just have to render service – just the natural part of your daily work profile. It only requires a mindset modification; a readiness to work in basic circumstances, not necessarily state of the art hospitals; to appreciate blessings, not professional fees; to work for outcome and not for income; and to dedicate time without obvious tangible returns.

THE RETURNS ARE TREMENDOUS!

The joy and appreciation in the eyes of a happy patient, the uplift in the general health of the society, and the chain of events that your service triggers, is a life changing experience. Resources unfold, donors pitch in, allied services ramp up, and a new world begins to evolve right before your eyes.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The huge majority of the Indian population is rural and under served in the health sector. Urban polarisation of healthcare facilities and the lack of even basic medical care in rural India has been our bugbear and parity in medical resources is still a pipe dream. Therefore every little effort in this direction counts. As we see more and more doctors get on the journey, we are convinced that the effort is snowballing into a nationwide movement that will hope to achieve equality in healthcare, providing basic medical facility to every corner of our great nation.

ANSWERING THE QUESTION.

Why do we do this? Because, it's easy to contribute. Because, the work satisfaction can't get better. And because, it is extremely fulfilling. That's why we do this!

For the greater cause

Deepa Deosthalee whose family has been an important patron of The Spine Foundation, shares her thoughts on the importance of the work being done here.



IN OCTOBER 2019, my mother and I attended the inauguration of an exhibition of artworks by renowned spine surgeon Dr Shekhar Bhojraj at Mumbai's Nehru Centre. I'd known Dr Bhojraj for over a decade, ever since my husband developed acute lower back pain and landed up on sir's operating table a year later. In every meeting I was struck by his calm demeanour and willingness to patiently answer even the most inane questions, belying the reputation of a high-flying surgeon and the pressures of a demanding practice (the numbers in the waiting room told their own story!).

I'd also followed him on Instagram for a while and was fascinated to read descriptions of his sketches and the frame-by-frame evolution of each creation. But I knew nothing about the Spine Foundation, and the exhibition was perhaps an effort to introduce friends and well-wishers to its remarkable journey. That morning, Dr Bhojraj's presentation took us through the riveting story of its genesis in the late-1990s, his long association with Dr. Rani and Dr. Abhay Bang's SEARCH and his regular trips to Gadchiroli to alleviate back pain for the residents of one of India's poorest districts since 2006.

Among the other speakers that day was Dr. Bang's son Amrut, who recounted how, when Dr. Bhojraj joined the 'Nirman' programme at SEARCH (designed to motivate youth towards

social action), he attended ALL sessions as a student, setting aside his own professional stature. And rather than merely parachuting into Adivasi terrain with the toolbox of modern science, he was open to interacting with local quasi-medical practitioners to understand how they approached spine-related issues.

It would have been an enormous contribution if Dr Bhojraj had just continued making the time to go to Gadchiroli every three months. But that was only the beginning. What started in one district spread to several others across Maharashtra and is branching out to other states as well. All of this requires funding as well as tie-ups with local government hospitals. But more importantly, it requires manpower.

Unlike many stalwarts who stand alone, basking under the spotlight, Dr. Bhojraj has nurtured and infused an entire team of talented surgeons and physiotherapists with his vision. It's one thing to sign up to train under and assist a star for professional enhancement, but it's something else to join him in an initiative that demands dedication and effort far beyond the busy schedules of big city doctors. Yet, just a cursory glance at the Spine Foundation's 'About Us' page, throws up a list of reputed surgeons not just in Mumbai, but across other parts of India and also the US and the UK.

Moreover, his team also trains local doctors and support staff to manage centres on their own, with minimum intervention from the Mumbai unit. The idea obviously being to not just take quality healthcare to underserved communities both in remote rural as well as urban areas, but also to make the model sustainable and scalable.

My late father, Mr. Y M Deosthalee, served as the Chief Financial Officer at Larsen & Toubro Ltd. for nearly two decades. He was a great believer in succession planning and by the time he retired, he had groomed not one, but two highly accomplished individuals, either of whom could have taken over the day he walked out of the building. He was also acutely conscious of his privilege and committed to giving back to society. But ever the astute finance man, he was diligent about scrutinising the causes and institutions he contributed to, visiting the facilities before and following up on the deliverables after.

He would have been proud to be associated with the Spine Foundation and my mother and I feel grateful for the opportunity to fulfil his wishes. For, in Dr. Bhojraj and his team, I see the same passion, commitment and integrity that my father had and equally, the humility to recognise that the cause is always greater than the individuals associated with it.

DR HEMANT MORPARIA

While most know him just as Morparia, his full introduction is Dr Hemant Morparia. A radiologist with Breach Candy Hospital in Mumbai, he has delighted millions of people with his cartoons. Here is a collection of his cartoons looking at the lighter side of orthopaedics and spine care.

