

*In service of the people since 2009*

ACCESSIBLE & AFFORDABLE SPINE CARE

**VN DESAI**  
VISHNUPRASAD NANDRAI DESAI  
MUNICIPAL GENERAL HOSPITAL







THE SPINE FOUNDATION'S  
JOURNEY AT VN DESAI HOSPITAL

# Milestones

**2009**

The Spine Foundation opens its spine unit at VN Desai Hospital

13th October.  
First spine surgery  
by TSF at VN Desai

**2009**

**2012**

20th January. TSF completes 100 spine surgeries at VN Desai Hospital.

Spine speciality operation theatre inaugurated at VN Desai Hospital, thanks to a donation by Mr Sunil Dalal.

**2013**

**2013**

Live deformity correction surgical workshop, attended by national and international faculties.

ASSI spine fellowship exam was conducted twice at VN Desai.

**2015**

**2015**

Specialist physiotherapy department for spine patients opens at VN Desai Hospital.

16th November. TSF completes 500 spine surgeries at VN Desai.

**2016**

**2019**

Spine OT renovated with a donation from Walchand Trust.

21st September. TSF completes 1000 spine surgeries at VN Desai.

**2022**

A project by  
THE **BRANDBOOK** COMPANY  
[www.brandbookcompany.in](http://www.brandbookcompany.in)





Typical morning rush at VN Desai Hospital. Photograph by Dr Shekhar Bhojraj.

# Hope Healing Humanity

**VN Desai Hospital, run by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, offers quality health care to poor patients in Mumbai.**



IT'S CALLED THE Maximum City. Described as a city that never sleeps. Lovingly referred to as Aamchi Mumbai. However, look beyond the dazzling lights and dramatic cityscape, and you will find that not all is well in Aamchi Mumbai.

Mumbai is home to over 22 million people. Yet lakhs struggle to meet basic necessities like permanent shelter, access to clean drinking water, or even healthcare. Mumbai's H-East Ward is a microcosm of the Maximum City. For those who know Mumbai, the H-East ward covers an area of roughly over 18 sq km. Its

*The hospital is named after the late Mayor of Mumbai, Shri Vishnuprasad Nandrai Desai, who held office between 1960-1962.*

being referred elsewhere for further care, if necessary. The hospital is named after the late Mayor of Mumbai, Shri Vishnuprasad Nandrai Desai, who held office between 1960-1962. Former Municipal Commissioner Shri BG Deshmukh inaugurated this hospital on 2nd January 1977. Initially, a maternity wing of 104 beds was started, and after two months, it was converted into a general hospital. Today, this hospital, run by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, consists of 500 beds with state-of-the-art medical technology. The hospital caters to

boundary extends from the Mithi River CST Road to the localities of Vakola and Kalina to the Dharavi Link Road and Vile Parle Subway. Though over 10 lakh stay in Mumbai's H-East ward, over 75% stay in slums. This whole ward is served by seven government health posts, six dispensaries, one maternity facility and one general hospital — VN Desai Municipal Hospital in Mumbai's Santa Cruz, East.

## IN SERVICE OF THE PEOPLE.

VN Desai Hospital is dedicated to serving marginalised communities, including slum dwellers and migrant workers. The patient population at VND primarily comprises economically disadvantaged individuals residing in urban areas who face financial constraints or lack access to private healthcare. Most patients seeking care at the hospital come from lower socio-economic backgrounds with significant health challenges that necessitate comprehensive medical care. Many patients suffer from chronic conditions like diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and respiratory disorders, requiring regular follow-up visits for ongoing management. In addition, patients often arrive at the facility with acute ailments that require emergency treatment, followed by diagnosis or stabilisation before





The administrative staff of VN Desai Hospital.



The VN Desai staff at its blood bank.



The nursing staff are an important and invaluable part of the team.



1000th free spine surgery celebrations.



Dr Rajeshree Yadav and Sister Rane.



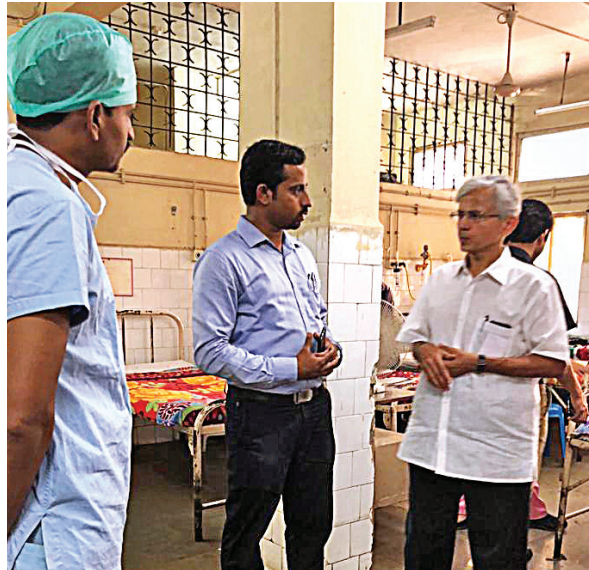
TSF and VND spine team outside the OT.



TSF Annual Day function at VN Desai.



Dr Nagad and Dr Hari discuss a case.



Dr Kenkre and Dr Bhojraj discuss a patient's rehab.



OPD Boys Sushant and Valmiki.



The men's ward for spine patients at VN Desai.





Mumbai's VN Desai Hospital provides healthcare and treatment to the less privileged strata of society.

### V N DESAI MEDICAL SUPERINTENDENT (2009-2023)

- Dr Shashikant Vadekar (01-08-2009 –10-09-2009)
- Dr Vinay Sabhahit (11-09-2009 – 30-04-2010)
- Dr Arun Kumar Sahu (01-05-2010 – 30-06-2010)
- Dr Shashikant Vadekar (01-07-2010 – 02-06-2011)
- Dr Vinay Sabhahit (03-06-2011 – 31-01-2013)
- Dr Vilin Keshav Sane (01-02-2013 – 20-07-2013)
- Dr Krishnakumar Pimple (21-07-2013 – 02-07-2014)
- Dr Ashok Dhongade (03-07-2014 – 31-05-2017)
- Dr Haresh Goimawala (01-06-2017 – 08-08-2018)
- Dr Rajeshree Prakash Jhadav (09-08-2018 – 29-02-2020)
- Dr Usha Manmohan Sharma (09-03-2020 – 06-10-2020)
- Dr Prashant Parbhakar More (07-10-2020 – 01-02-2023)
- Dr Bava Harbanssingh Premsingh (02-03-2023 – Present)

outpatients and inpatients with specialised departments. The hospital is equipped with the latest medical equipment and is staffed with highly trained medical professionals. It provides its patients with a wide range of services, from general health checkups, diagnostics, treatments, surgeries, and other medical services.

#### IN SERVICE OF THE COMMUNITY.

The hospital's culture revolves around providing quality health care with respect for all patients, regardless of their background or financial status. The staff understands that good communication between physicians and patients is crucial for successful treatment outcomes. The hospital takes a holistic approach to treating illnesses, including both psychological and physical treatments.

The hospital managed by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation has significantly impacted the socio-economic lives of the people who access its services. By providing free medical care, the hospital has reduced the financial burden on the poor who are unable to afford private healthcare, enabling them to focus on other important aspects of their life such as education and employment. In addition, the hospital has created employment opportunities for a large number of people from the local community, contributing to the growth of the local economy. The hospital also offers health education services, which have raised awareness about preventative healthcare and disease management, improving the community's overall health.

As VN Desai Hospital nears half a century of service to the people, it promises to rededicate itself to the people of Mumbai.

**THE HOSPITAL'S  
CULTURE  
REVOLVES  
AROUND  
PROVIDING  
QUALITY  
HEALTH  
CARE WITH  
RESPECT FOR  
ALL PATIENTS,  
REGARDLESS  
OF THEIR  
BACKGROUND  
OR FINANCIAL  
STATUS**

### SPECIALTIES AT VN DESAI HOSPITAL

- Anaesthesiology
- General medicine
- General Surgery
- Gynecology and Obstetric
- Paediatrics
- ENT (Ear, Nose & Throat)
- Ophthalmology
- Orthopedics
- **Spine Unit**
- Radiology
- Pathology
- Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy Department

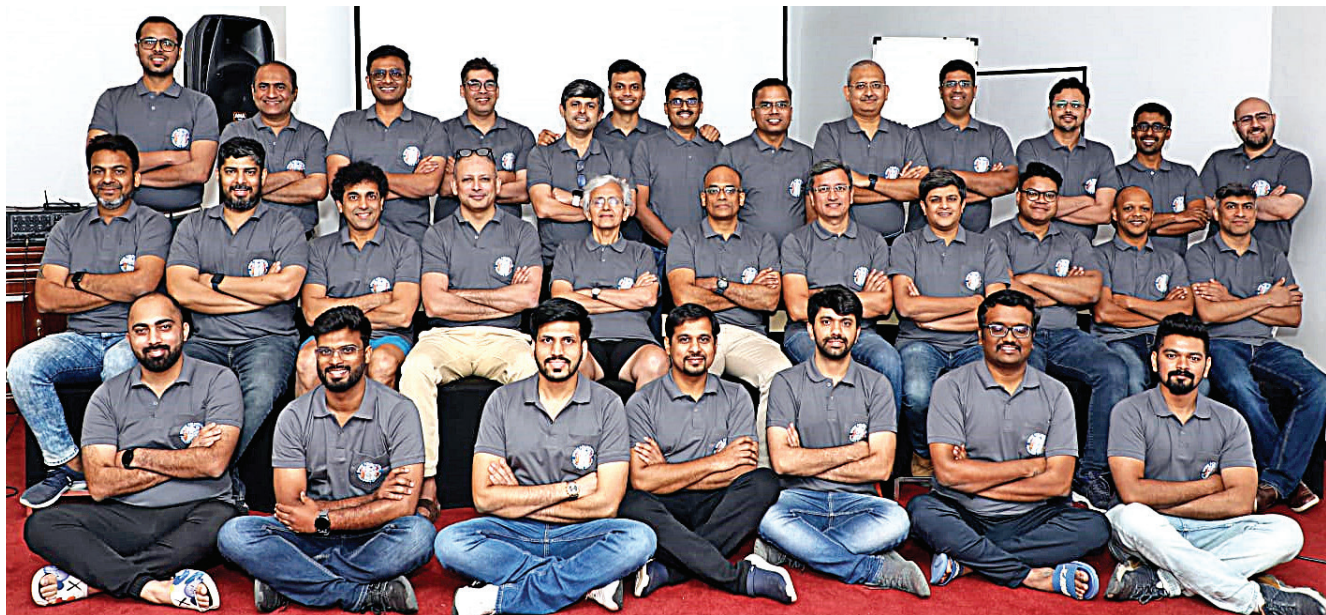
### FACILITIES AT VN DESAI HOSPITAL

- OPD
- Inpatient admission
- 24-hour open emergency ward and department
- 24-hour working blood bank
- Radiology: Xray, USG and CT scan
- Pathology and Microbiology labs
- TICU and MICU
- Modular OT offers a wide range of surgeries: spine surgery, orthopaedic surgeries including joint replacement and arthroscopy, general surgeries, obstetrics and gynaecology surgeries, ENT surgeries, ophthalmology surgeries
- 24x7 pharmacy
- Dedicated ambulance services equipped with necessary life support systems



# Quality Spine Care

The Spine Foundation at VN Desai Hospital.



Team Spine Foundation during its 25th year celebrations.

19TH OF MAY 1998. The Spine Foundation was born out of a doctor's calling to serve the poor and underprivileged in his country. The doctor was Dr Shekhar Bhojraj. A man who had trained himself across the world in learning the latest



Spine Foundation was established to do just that; bring quality spine care to the people who could not afford or access good medical treatment.

The Spine Foundation started treating and operating on patients for free at the SEARCH campus in Gadchiroli, Bai Jerbai Wadia Hospital for Children and HV Tilak Hospital in Mumbai. However, when they wanted to reach out to the poor people of Mumbai, they reached out to the VN Desai, a municipal hospital frequented by the poor who could not afford private hospitals. When the Spine Foundation first proposed the idea, everyone was sceptical. There was just no precedent for such an idea. Moreover, the hospital had no manpower or infrastructure to spare for The Spine Foundation. But Dr Bhojraj and his team steered through every obstacle, reached out to every power they could and worked ceaselessly to make it happen. Finally, in 2009, the Spine Foundation opened its spine unit at the VN Desai Municipal General Hospital to bring spine care to people who could not afford it.

The Spine Foundation team during rounds at VN Desai ward.

developments in the emerging speciality of spine surgery. He set up India's first exclusive spine surgery speciality unit at KEM Hospital. Dr Bhojraj is the first specialised dedicated spine surgeon in the country. His pioneering journey to establish specialised spine treatment in India has made him a living legend in this field.

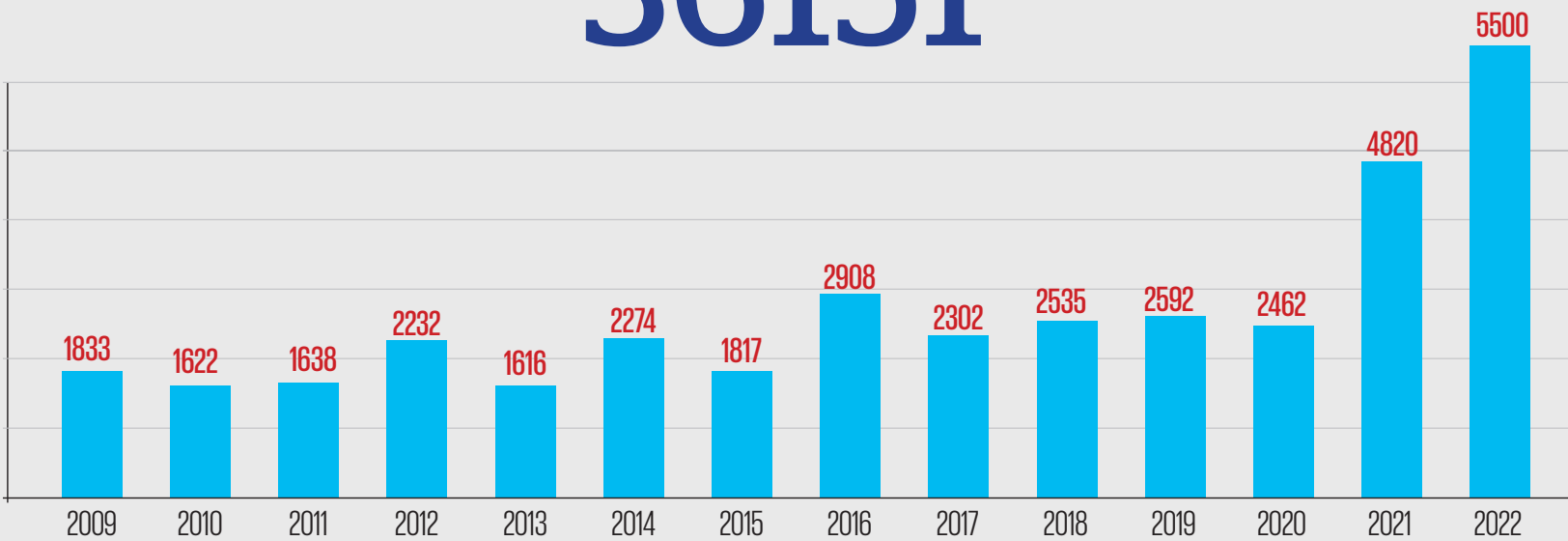
From a family seeped in Gandhian values, Dr Bhojaraj always wanted to give back to society. To serve the people who could not access good medical care, either because they did not have the financial means or there was no medical care available in the vicinity. The

# Empowering Spine wellness

The Spine OPD at VN Desai is bringing quality spine care to the poor.

NUMBER OF CASES TREATED  
AT VN DESAI SPINE OPD [2009-2022]

36151



The Spine OPD at VN Desai is bringing quality spine care to the poor. The Spine Foundation treated 1833 OPD patients at VN Desai in the first year. Since then, the number has grown exponentially. By the end of 2022, nearly 40,000 patients had passed through this OPD.



Spine OPD at VND in 2009.



By 2023, the numbers have multiplied.



Dr Bhojraj, the architect of the movement.



# Helping Hands since 2009



Dr Shekhar Bhojraj



Dr Shilpa Bhojraj



Dr Abhay Nene



Dr Sheetal Mohite



Dr Raghuprasad Varma



Dr Premik Nagad



Dr Priyank Patel



Dr Gaurish Kenkre



Dr Sameer Kalkotwar



Dr Gautam Prasad



Dr Tarak Patel



Dr Tushar Deore



Dr Akshay Jain



Dr Tarush Rustagi



Dr Bharat Sarkar



Dr Ismail Shaik



Dr Aaditya Kashikar



Dr Nishant Kumar



Dr Hrushikesh Mehata



Dr Kutbuddin Akbary



Dr Akshay Gadia



Dr Mandar Borde



Dr Tanay Prabhu



Dr Gowthaman Kamaraj



Dr Jayesh Bhanushali



Dr Suman Dhar



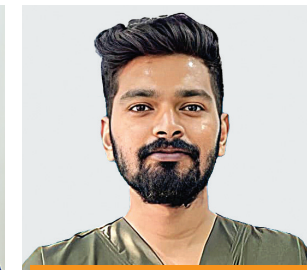
Dr Alok Jain



Dr Gajendra Pawal



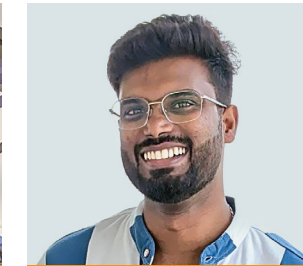
Dr Tejasvi Agarwal



Dr Hari Krishnan A



Dr Harshit Dave



Dr Shiva Kumar



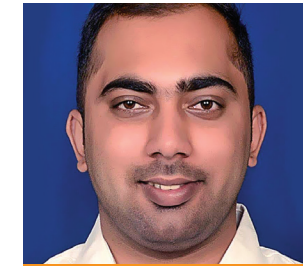
Dr Harshal Bamb



Dr Tausif Ahmed Shikalgar



Dr Naresh Chaudhary



Dr Pranav Rajendra



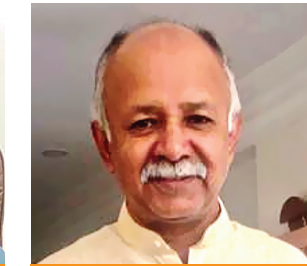
Dr Ram Prabhoo



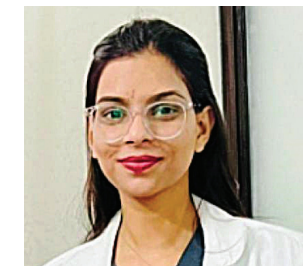
Dr Sujit Korday



Dr Laxita Jain



Mr Sunil Dalal



Dr Dimpal Singh



Dr Jayshree Kore



Dr Anita Karande



Mr Roshan Kule



Mr Sagar Ghade



Mr Mahesh Palan



Mrs Smita Phondke



Mr Sushant Remje



Mrs Mamata Desai

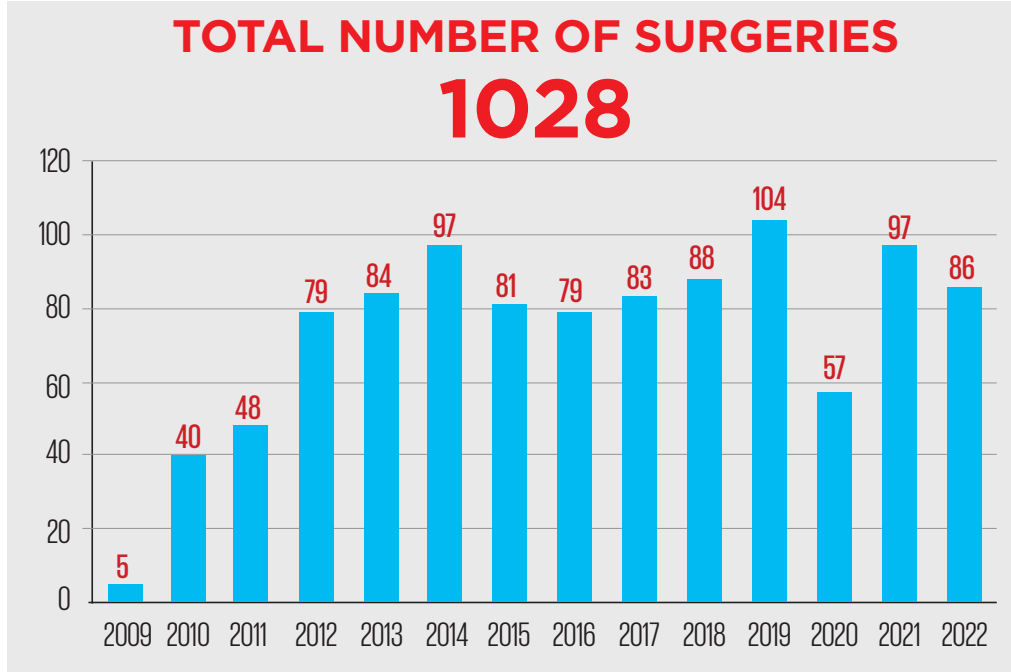


Mr Joy Chaudhuri



# Surgery With Compassion

Free surgeries that are at par with the best.



THE PENTAGON CHARITABLE Foundation stepped in to sponsor the operation theatre that the foundation needed at VN Desai Hospital for spine surgeries. Thanks to their help, the hospital has a well-equipped OT running today.

In its very first year of operation, The Spine Foundation performed 20 surgeries at VN Desai Hospital. By 2017, OPD patients had gone up to 2303 and 83 surgeries were done that year. And with each passing year, the number of poor patients kept multiplying. And then came 2020, and the Coronavirus decimated the world. This was the time when the poor became even more vulnerable. The Spine Foundation doctors fought through the difficult conditions and shortage of everything, including oxygen, to continue treating medical emergencies. These emergency surgeries done under spinal anaesthesia are a challenge at the best of times and became a critical test of the doctors' skill and excellence under Covid's ominous shadow. These difficult times bought out the best in The Spine Foundation.

Just because The Spine Foundation treats

***Complication rates of surgeries in VN Desai Hospital are at par with the best private hospitals in Mumbai.***



**TYPES OF SURGERIES 2009-2022**

1	Lumbar spine surgeries	745
2	Dorsal spine surgeries	13
3	Cervical spine surgeries	59
4	Tandem surgeries	82
5	Spondylodiscitis (spine infections)	79
6	Spine tumours	14
7	Anterior cervical surgeries	14
8	Deformity Correction Surgeries	15
9	Occipitocervical surgeries	7
10	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1028</b>

poor patients for free does not mean that the patients get second-class treatment. At VN Desai, the foundation performs complicated surgeries like those for congenital scoliosis correction with the help of neuromonitoring. The Spine Foundation doctors have also started doing minimally invasive surgeries in VN Desai hospital, like tubular microscopic surgeries (using an ENT microscope) and endoscopic surgeries (using an arthroscopic video monitoring system) along with complex intradural spinal tumour surgeries in team with neurosurgeons.

Thanks to the foundation's generous donors, the OT at VN Desai has been renovated. Today, this hospital boasts modular OT with laminar flow and proper anaesthesia setup, which is as good as any other operation theatre you would find in a private five-star hospital in Mumbai. Thanks to this sterilised OT, surgeries at VN Desai have become safer, with lesser chance of infection and other complications. Complication rates of surgeries in VN Desai Hospital are at par with the best private hospitals in Mumbai.

# Strength in adversity.



SAVITA SHASHIKANT REMJE is a small woman with an easy smile. Only when you see her strong, calloused hands do you realise the strength within her diminutive frame. She lives in a small village of about 100 houses called Ainekher near Chiplun. Mother to two sons, Sushant and Prashant, her husband passed away when her elder son Sushant was just five. He drowned while gathering lotus flowers from a pond that he would sell to keep the kitchen fire burning. This illiterate woman had to do manual jobs like cleaning yards, gathering fallen cashew nuts and removing weeds. She sent her elder son to Mumbai, where he found a housekeeping job at Wadia hospital. after some time, when Sushant got a job at VN Desai Hospital, he jumped at the better prospect.

Even as her son made his way up to Mumbai, Savita started noticing a pain in her left leg. She ignored the pain and continued her work as she needed every Rupee to keep her body and soul together. As her pain worsened, she took the support of a stick. Eventually, after two years, Savita had no choice but to take to the bed, unable to move without pain.

As fate would have it, her elder son Shashikant had just found a new job at VN Desai with the Spine Foundation. He spoke to the doctors at the foundation about his mother's condition. They asked Shashikant to get his mother to VN Desai.

The doctors discovered a strange coincidence when Savita Remje was scheduled for surgery. She would be the 1000th patient to be operated for free, by the Spine Foundation at the VN Desai Hospital. Remember, VN Desai Hospital is just one of the many hospitals where the foundation offers free spine surgery. Another important thing to note is that while the Spine Foundation operated on 1000 patients at VN Desai hospital between September 2009 and September 2022, it treated 35556 patients for various other spine diseases.

Savita Remje has since fully recovered and is staying with her son in Wadala, a suburb of Mumbai. Her younger son, too, has shifted to the city to look after his mother and is looking for a job in Mumbai. Her sons do not want their mother to work any more and continue living with them in Mumbai. Will Savita stay with her sons in the city or return to her village? We do not know. however, one thing is undeniable. The Spine Foundation has given a thousand people a choice on how they want their future to be. And hope for a better life.





## Walking again



DHYANDEV SALUNKHE, a 72 year old male was brought to The spine OPD by his son on a stretcher. The patient had a chronic spine problem which worsened and he was not able to stand or walk or use his hands. Dhyandev was completely dependent on family members for all basic activities.

He was evaluated and diagnosed with severe cervical spondylotic myelopathy and severe Lumbar canal stenosis (compression of spinal cord in neck region and lower back region: Tandem stenosis). He was operated with a major spine surgery; Cervical and lumbar Decompression surgery in the same sitting at VN Desai Hospital. Post operative he received intensive physiotherapy and rehabilitation by the physiotherapy team. He started improving from the second post operative day, and completely recovered in 4 months. He came walking to the OPD and could do all his activities independently.



## Restoring hope



RESHMA KHAN, A 22-year-old female from Kandivali, was presented to VN Desai Hospital with a case of neglected D11-L1 TB spondylodiscitis with severe cord compression. She arrived on a stretcher, unable to move her legs (paraplegia), and had been bedridden and unable to walk for a month. Her bladder and bowel functions were also affected, with an inability to control them. Upon further evaluation, it was revealed that she had initially received treatment from quacks for six months, which had worsened her spine problem. Her MRI results were suggestive of tuberculosis of the spine with severe spinal cord compression.

Reshma underwent spine decompression and Hartshill fixation, a rare surgery at the hospital. Remarkably, she was able to start standing on the second day after the surgery. By postoperative day 10, she had progressed to walking independently with minimal support. Additionally, her bladder and bowel function had fully recovered. The successful surgery and postoperative recovery enabled Reshma Khan to regain mobility and resume normal activities.





# Defying the odds



MEHTAB KHAN IS a 22-year-old man from Sultanpur in Uttar Pradesh. He came to VN Desai with complaints of severe imbalance, inability to walk, and difficulty performing daily tasks, such as holding a pen or eating food, after falling from a height three months prior. Before coming to VN Desai Hospital, he had previously sought medical care at multiple hospitals in Uttar Pradesh. Upon thorough evaluation, he was diagnosed with C4-5 cervical spondylotic myelopathy. He underwent a successful C4-5 anterior cervical discectomy and fusion (ACDF) surgery at VN Desai Hospital. Remarkably, he started showing signs of recovery from the first day after the surgery. Within two months, he had made a complete recovery, regained his ability to walk and function normally, and was able to return to his job.



Another day in the office for Dr Nagad, Dr Kashikar and the TSF surgical team.



Savita Remje is the 1000th patient to get operated on by TSF at VN Desai.



Deformity correction course for surgeons at VN Desai Hospital.



Anesthesiologist Dr Anita Karande, with OT assistants Mhatre and Roshan.



Surgeons at work.



Anesthesiologist Dr Jayshree.



# Spine Health Outreach

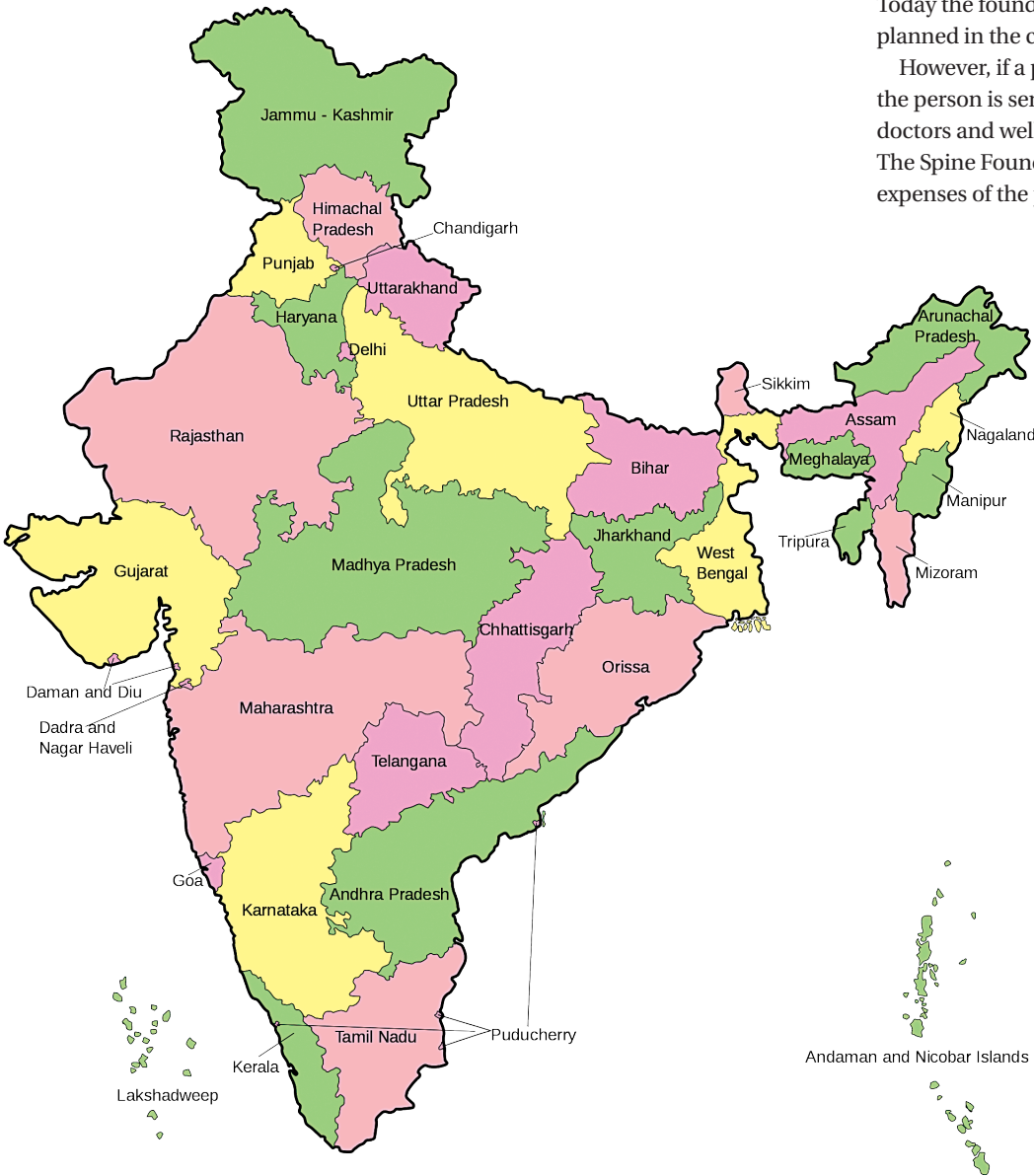
How The Spine Foundation's Rural Spine Care Centres enable people living in rural India to access quality spine care at VN Desai.

ECONOMIC AND GEOGRAPHIC constraints mean that a large number of people have no access to quality health care across our country. For the poor people living in often remote rural areas, a trip to a big city like Mumbai to access quality medical care is as impossible as a trip to the moon. The Spine Foundation's mission is to provide quality spine care to the poorest, even in the remotest parts of India. The Spine Foundation works with various

government and non-government organisations to reach out to the poor and help them live better lives.

The Spine Foundation has set up a chain of Rural Spine Care Centres to reach out to the people living in the interiors. These RSCCs are set up at government hospitals in locations that are accessible to the rural population. The doctors travel here to hold spine camps where they conduct regular OPDs and surgeries. Today the foundation operates 13 active RSCCs, with many more planned in the coming months.

However, if a patient requires more specialised treatment, the person is sent to VN Desai Hospital, where highly qualified doctors and well-equipped operation theatres are available. The Spine Foundation pays for the transportation and medical expenses of the patient.



## RURAL SPINE CARE CENTRES (RSCC)

1. Gadchiroli
2. Kolhapur
3. Nandurbar
4. Dehradun
5. Sittilingi
6. Akola
7. Ambajogai
8. Ratnagiri
9. Dhule
10. Aurangabad
11. Dharampur
12. Ranchi
13. Goa
14. Kerala
15. Kolar gold fields
16. Mandsaur (MP)
17. Sagar (MP)
18. Dhar (MP)
19. Talasari (Maharashtra)
20. Rajasthan
21. Bihar
22. West bengal
23. Tripura

■ Established RSCC  
■ Planned RSCC



Bustling OTs, busy OPDs and a packed schedule at this camp in Gadchiroli. Doctors give up their weekends to hold the free surgery camps.



Dr. Gautam Zaveri conducting the camp at Dharampur, a small town in Gujarat.



Snapshots of a surgery camp in Dehradun.





The Spine Foundation team arrives at Ambajogai for a free surgery camp.



TSF team with DY Patil Kolhapur team during a surgical camp.



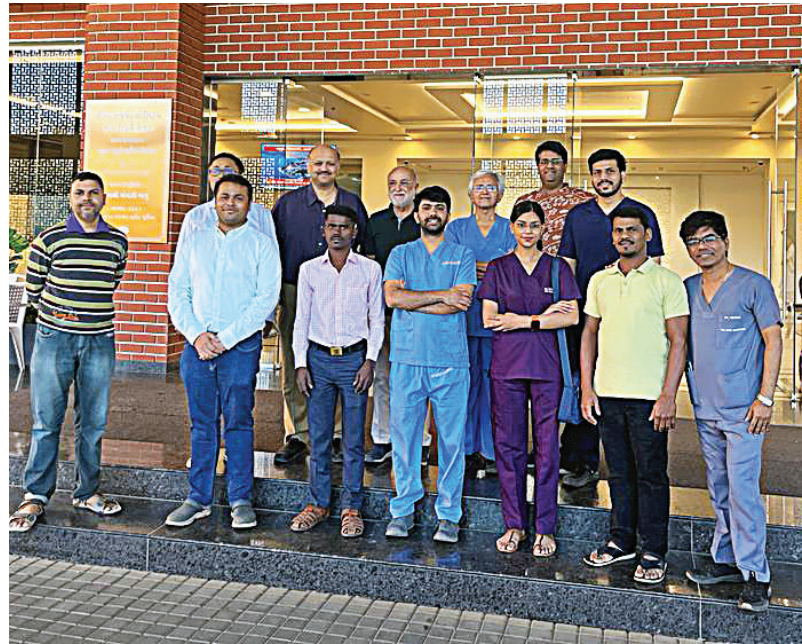
At Sittilingi, near Salem in Tamil Nadu.



Paediatric spine care at Wadia in Mumbai.



Surgery in progress.



Picture taken during a camp at Dharampur.



Lions Club Nandurbar and Rotary Club Mumbai joining hands with TSF.



Dr Bhojraj checking a patient at a camp.



It's always a busy weekend at the camps.



TSF team at a camp in Ambajogai,





# Breaking barriers



LATIF SHAIKH, A 22-year-old male from Nagalgaon, Taluka Kandhar, district Nanded, had a road traffic accident in August 2021 that resulted in a three-month stay in the ICU of another hospital. Despite recovering from the ICU, he continued to experience significant neck pain and restricted movements. Upon further evaluation, he was diagnosed with a complex fracture around his neck, specifically a displaced odontoid fracture.

After a year, Latif Shaikh sought treatment at the spine unit of VN Desai Hospital. He underwent a complex spine surgery around the neck, specifically an occipitocervical fusion, under neuromonitoring. The Spine Foundation completely bore the cost of neuromonitoring, implants and surgery.

Latif Shaikh began showing signs of recovery from the first day after the surgery, and at the two-month mark, he had made a complete recovery. The successful surgery and postoperative rehabilitation allowed Latif Shaikh to regain his neck movements and overcome his persistent neck pain, significantly improving his quality of life.



# Back to farming



AMARNATH PANDEY, A 60-year-old male from Shivpur village near Mughalsarai, Uttar Pradesh, presented with symptoms of imbalance, inability to walk for more than 5 minutes, fear of falling, and hand dysfunction persisting for three years. He had sought medical care at multiple private and government healthcare facilities but had not found a solution to his problem. He then sought treatment at the spine unit at VN Desai Hospital.

After a thorough evaluation, he was diagnosed with a complex spine problem: basilar invasion with stenosis. Due to the high-risk nature of the condition, he underwent a complex spine surgery around the neck called occipitocervical fusion, performed by the skilled team of The Spine Foundation at VN Desai Hospital. The Spine Foundation fully bore the cost of the neuromonitoring, implants, and surgery. Amarnath Pandey started showing signs of recovery on the first day after the surgery. Within two months, he had made a complete recovery and regained his full function. The successful outcome of the surgery enabled him to resume his daily activities without limitations.



# Immobility To Mobility

Specialised physiotherapy at VN Desai helps patients get back to their feet.

THE SPINAL CORD is called “Merudanda” in Sanskrit, as it is rightfully considered an individual's axis to the universe. A patient with a spinal cord injury undergoes numerous tests of willpower, patience, and determination while facing the challenging circumstances imposed by their physical limitations. These limitations confine them to the bed, and the associated physical and emotional struggles can often diminish their morale. The Spine Foundation decided to fight against this using rehabilitation as a strong weapon. Thus dawned the realisation of the need for a special rehabilitation unit that differed from the general pain management physiotherapy unit already available at VND hospital. Spine patients needed a special rehabilitation program to transition to daily activities successfully. The training of neurological patients involved training of trunk and balance, re-educating the paralysed muscles for their lost function and thus, this type of training needed specialist intervention. The conception of this department took place under the leadership of Dr Gaurish Kenkre in 2015 at VND. Dr Gaurish Kenkre a Bobath and adult neurology rehabilitation practitioner trained at WCRC, Cape Town, South Africa, took up the daunting task of getting the patients back on their feet, giving them another shot at life. The department lacked high-tech equipment and modalities, but that couldn't break the team's determination or spirit. Using the years of experience as his main wealth Dr Gaurish put together a functional Rehabilitation department using simple and everyday things that one could possibly lay hands on. Plinths of wood, IV stands, ropes, pulleys, bedsheets, and broken chairs were all turned into equipment for rehabilitation. In the first year, more than 60 patients were exclusively admitted for rehabilitation alone. The patients were from the rural fragments of Maharashtra. Poverty and disabling spinal conditions rendered most of these patients bedbound and at the mercy of their caregivers, who had little resources or income. The rehabilitation design was patient-centric, putting the patient's needs and concerns first. Simple equipment and efficient and effective rehab techniques can equal the benefits achieved with high-tech equipment and modalities. This was reflected by the fact that most patients were sent home post-rehab walking and functionally independent.

**RUSHADA KHATOON:** When this little girl was brought to VN Desai from Uttar Pradesh, she was paraplegic, and her lower limbs were paralysed. She couldn't even stand on her own two legs, and the little girl's future seemed dark. The doctors of the Spine Foundation wouldn't let that happen if they could help it, and what followed was a long and complicated operation.



Though the surgery was a success, it was just the beginning of a long journey for the child. Dr Kenkre put her through a long and intensive physiotherapy regime to make her walk again.

**RAMESH THAKUR:** This man had been bedridden for two months with Ankylosis spondylitis with Anderson's lesion when the doctors operated upon him. Dr Kenkre and his team ensured he was walking within a month of his operation.

**AMAN SHARMA:** This boy from Uttar Pradesh came to the Spine Foundation doctors in September 2015. Aman had dorsal laminectomy and fixation. He had been operated elsewhere and had been bedridden since then. He had fixed flexion contractures in both knees and three deep bed sores. Dr Bhojraj advised aggressive rehab. Dr Gaurish Kenkre and his team started an aggressive stretching regime to break Aman's fixed flexion deformity. They worked on this boy, who till now had no hope of ever standing again till he was back on his feet.



## Second chance



NEERAJ TIWARI'S LIFE changed forever in 2018. An accident led to a fractured spine and spinal cord damage. The local hospital operated on him. After the operation, his vital signs were stable, but he had a complete loss of motor control in both his lower limbs and sensory deprivation. His trunk balance was markedly impaired. Muscle strength was 0/5 on MMT grading for all muscle groups in the lower extremity. MMT is an acronym for Manual Muscle Testing used to determine the extent and degree of damage to a muscle. A normal person measures at Grade 5 on this test. Neeraj Tiwari scored zero on this test. This grade is given when the patient displays no visible movement or palpable muscle contraction. An active man in the prime of his life had been sentenced to life as a paraplegic.

The patient was shifted to VN Desai Hospital for rehabilitation due to his financial situation. The Spine Foundation's Rehab Team, led by Dr Gaurish Kenkre, took on the challenge. They carefully evaluated the patient's current status and devised a treatment plan focusing on functional independence. Could they make this nearly impossible journey from bed to shackle-free mobility? The patient's medical condition resulted in him being bed-bound. He had to rely on the mercy and assistance of his caregivers for his smallest needs. This completely demolished his self-worth and self-esteem. Neeraj and the Rehab Team began the odyssey to unshackle the chains of dependency that imprisoned him. The road to recovery was a Marathon, where consistency mattered more than speed. You could slow down but never stop. It demanded courage and determination. The rehab team set him daily goals, and Neeraj trained for trunk control and balance as diligently as any athlete. He underwent strength training for trunk and upper body muscles to enable him to lift his body with his hands. With it came the first milestone. Neeraj Tiwari could now sit independently and perform most activities of daily life by himself.

Yet, this was just the halfway mark. The next task for the rehab team was to help Neeraj achieve motor control in the lower extremity muscles with strength at 0/5. They put him through a rigorous training regimen using suspension, transfer boards, splints, currents and body mechanics. The first task was to enable him to stand independently. They did this through an HKAFO (Hip-Knee-Ankle-Foot-Orthosis) splint to stabilise the hip and lower spine. After standing balance was achieved with HKAFO splints, ambulation training began. It was learning to walk again. Neeraj and Rehab Team fought each day and overcame each obstacle breaking down the dependence on splints each time. He graduated from using HKAFO to just KAFO and ultimately to just AFO. This was a remarkable recovery for the patient who was once completely bedridden, required two people to help him walk with a Walker, to walking independently with splints till finally walking with minimal splints and support. The trunk, hip and knee muscles upgraded from a strength score of 0/5 to 3/5. Being able to walk independently with minimal support and just an AFO gave back Neeraj his self-worth. He is now working towards achieving independence from any walking aid. Neeraj Tiwari and the Rehab Team had completed the arduous voyage from the shackles of dependency to that of maximal independence.



# Spreading The Skill

**The Spine Foundation is preparing the next generation of spine surgeons at VN Desai.**



***In its pursuit of excellence, TSF organises workshops and events to advance knowledge and expertise in spine care.***

THE SPINE FOUNDATION team at VN Desai Hospital is dedicated to treating poor spine patients and nurturing excellence in spine care by facilitating the growth and development of other medical professionals in this specialised field. The foundation aims to equip healthcare practitioners with the necessary skills and knowledge to provide comprehensive care for spine patients through various training programs and collaborations.

At the heart of the Spine Foundation's mission is the training and mentoring of Spine Foundation Fellows. These fellows undergo a rigorous program at VN Desai Hospital, where they receive specialised training in spine surgery. With a strong emphasis on developing skills and instilling confidence, the fellows are prepared to manage and treat spine problems independently. Over the years, the Spine Foundation has successfully trained 36 fellows, creating a network of highly skilled professionals dedicated to providing exceptional spine care.

In a collaborative effort, the Spine Foundation works closely with DY Patil Medical College in Kolhapur. As part of this collaboration, postgraduate residents from DY Patil Hospital are given the opportunity to rotate monthly at VN Desai Hospital. These residents gain valuable hands-on experience during their rotation and receive primary training in handling spine patients. This exposure to the specialised field of spine care enhances their skills and equips them to become competent healthcare professionals.

The Spine Foundation recognises the importance of a holistic approach to spine healthcare. The foundation



***ASSI exams being conducted at VN Desai Hospital.***

extends its training programs beyond surgeons and residents to achieve this. Physiotherapists are also provided with specialised training in physiotherapy and rehabilitation of spine patients, ensuring comprehensive care throughout recovery. Additionally, OT assistants, ward nurses, and other staff members are trained to handle patients with spine problems, ensuring their comfort and well-being during treatment. The Spine Foundation

aims to deliver high-quality, multidisciplinary care to spine patients by training a diverse range of healthcare professionals.

Beyond medical expertise, the Spine Foundation is committed to addressing the social aspects of spine healthcare. Both fellows and residents undergo sensitisation and priming to recognise the need for reaching out to non-affording and inaccessible individuals who require spine healthcare. By actively promoting the importance of accessible care, the foundation aims to bridge the gap between those in need and the specialised treatment they deserve. This social aspect of spine healthcare is woven into the foundation's training programs, ensuring that future healthcare professionals are equipped with technical skills and a compassionate and inclusive approach to patient care.

In its pursuit of excellence, the Spine Foundation organises workshops and events to advance knowledge and expertise in spine care. One notable event is the live Spine Deformity Correction Workshop held at VN Desai Hospital. This workshop brings together national and international spine surgeons who share their expertise, discuss cutting-edge techniques, and exchange knowledge. By facilitating such events, the Spine Foundation actively contributes to the growth and advancement of spine treatment, ensuring that healthcare professionals stay updated with the latest developments in the field.

The Spine Foundation at VN Desai Hospital stands as a beacon of excellence in spine care. Through its comprehensive training programs, collaborations with educational institutions, and focus on addressing social aspects, the foundation creates a network of skilled professionals dedicated to providing exceptional care to spine patients.

# Funding the dream

**Utilising existing government medical schemes for the poor, like MJPJAY that most people are unaware of.**



YOU MIGHT BE surprised that many government and local health financing schemes go to waste because people are unaware of them. The Spine Foundation identifies and taps into these government programs to fund its mission. One example is the Mahatma Jyotirao Phule Jan Arogya Yojana (MJPJAY). This is a flagship health insurance scheme of the Government of Maharashtra. The scheme provides end-to-end cashless services for identified diseases through a network of service providers

***You might be surprised that many government and local health financing schemes go to waste***

from the Government and private sectors. The scheme earlier was known as Rajiv Gandhi Jeevandayee Arogya Yojana, which was started on 2nd July 2012 in eight districts and then was expanded to 28 districts of Maharashtra from 21st November 2013.

For patients not eligible for the scheme, the foundation bears the treatment cost and makes sure that proper treatment is given to all patients with spine problems coming to the VN Desai Hospital.





# Quality of life



SUKHWARABAI SURYAVANSHI, A 50-year-old female from Chattisgarh, sought treatment for her low back pain with severe leg pain and difficulty walking for more than 10 minutes. Despite the distance, she travelled all the way to Mumbai for her treatment.

Upon diagnosis, Sukhwarabai was found to have Lumbar Canal Stenosis, a condition affecting the spine. To address the issue, she underwent successful surgery performed by the spine unit at VN Desai Hospital. Remarkably, she was able to walk the very next day after the surgery, and her leg pain had completely disappeared. She can now walk for over an hour without discomfort, greatly improving her mobility and quality of life.



# Freedom from pain



SULOCHANA PAWAR IS a 70-year-old woman from Kalyan near Mumbai. She faced high health risks due to having only one functioning kidney. She sought medical care at The Spine Foundation clinic located at the VN Desai Municipal General Hospital, Mumbai, as she experienced severe leg pain that rendered her unable to stand or walk. After a thorough evaluation, she was diagnosed with severe Lumbar Canal Stenosis at the L3-S1 level. Despite her financial constraints, she underwent a successful L3-S1 lumbar decompression surgery at the VN Desai Municipal General Hospital, which was provided to her free of charge. Following the surgery, she was able to regain her mobility and was grateful to resume her daily activities with improved quality of life.



# Dream Big

**Building a stronger future. Dr Shekhar Bhojraj shares The Spine Foundation's vision for the next 25 years.**



IT WAS A fine Sunday morning not long ago when I was cycling along with my fellow trustee Dr Premik Nagad when he casually told me that The Spine Foundation was flush with more funds than we could spend. The fact hit me like a sledgehammer. We had spent our days, weekends and months for the past 25 years treating and operating on poor spine patients without once stopping to think about funds! While some would regard it as good news, it was a worrying sign to me. Donor's money lying unused in the corpus was not a comfortable thought, and in my opinion, it reflected a degree of inefficiency and inadequacy on our part.

A social service organisation must maintain a critical balance between income and expenditure. It is a sign of complacency if you haven't. It was a wake-up call for me. If we have to make our dreams come true, we must step back, introspect and analyse, and course correct if necessary.

**OUR DREAM OF A DAY WHEN NOBODY SUFFERS FROM A BACK PROBLEM DUE TO LACK OF MONEY AND RESOURCES, IS A FEASIBLE AND ACHIEVABLE TASK**

## AN ORGANIC GROWTH.

The Spine Foundation started in 1998 to deliver quality spine care to people caught in the web of poverty. Just a small team of people determined to make a difference. As time passed, we could serve more patients, across more places, with more people joining the team. We got more support from our donors and well-wishers, who saw consistent results over a quarter of a century and extended their support. Our growth had been organic without the need for any publicity or marketing. Seeing our work, the Government of Maharashtra approached us in 2018 to replicate our model across the state through Government Medical Colleges in interior Maharashtra. We responded, and The Spine Foundation is reaching out to many more people today through the GMCs at Akola, Ambajogai, Aurangabad and Dhule.

That brings us to how we managed to have surplus funds despite scaling up our operations over the years. There are two

reasons for this. First, we have directly linked our donors to Gadchiroli, Ambajogai, Kolhapur, Nandurbar and VN Desai projects. It covers all operational costs like investigations, medications, surgeries, implants, and anaesthesia, as well as the travel and boarding costs of the team. This leaves us to do what we do best, lending clinical know-how and surgical expertise to these projects.

The second reason is that we use the underutilised state and national government health schemes that help subsidise and fund our projects and programs, especially in government-run medical colleges and hospitals. The Rajiv Gandhi, Jyotirao Phule, and Ayushman Bharat schemes are good examples. Using these two things, we have been able to get the maximum out of the money coming to the foundation. And it ended with more funds than we could spend.

That brings us to the question. What are our plans going forward for the next 25 years? The first is to widen the quality, span and depth of our operations. To ensure better quality care is available across a wider geographical spread, even in the remotest parts of the country. To achieve this, we must create self-sustainable projects that run on their own funding with locally available talent. The foundation will empower these projects through training and knowledge transfer. The other task is to raise awareness about the availability of free spine care so that more people can benefit from this.

## MAKING MONEY WORK HARDER.

Looking forward to the next 25 years, how will the foundation utilise its funds best? The Spine Foundation's basket of expenses can be put under four heads: manpower, infrastructure, creating awareness and centrifugal expansion of activities. These can be scaled to a state, national, or international level.

The need for manpower is inexhaustible, with requirements for different specialists. Nursing staff in clinics, wards and OTs, physiotherapists, Rural Spine Clinical Fellows and assistants, and support specialists like anaesthetists, physicians, neurologists, and rheumatologists. We also need



academic researchers and health economists to help forge the way ahead.

The Spine Foundation needs to invest in better infrastructure: instruments for minimally invasive techniques; imaging equipment like X-rays, C-arm, CT and MRI; operation theatre tables, lights, laminar flow, burr, headlight, cord monitoring etc.

Next comes investment in creating awareness about the work done by the foundation. This awareness is important for poor patients who suffer in quiet desperation since they do not know that help is available. Word also gets out to people who want to contribute to the cause of providing quality spine care for all. Also, it encourages the team who are working tirelessly around the clock.

For this, we need to increase our social media activity on platforms like Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. We need to establish our presence on Ortho

TV and YouTube. We should also explore media like radio that can broadcast our message to a focused audience. We also need a stream of publications that include newsletters, books and monographs tailored for the relevant audience. Exhibitions are another platform we have used successfully and can be an effective communication tool.

The Spine Foundation's final spending head is the centrifugal expansions of its activities. At a state level, we look at Akola, Ambajogai, Chiplun, Dapoli, Gadchiroli, Kolhapur, Nandurbar and Ratnagiri. On the national level, we need to expand our footprint from Dehradun, Dharampur and Sittilingi to states like Chattisgarh, Himachal, Karnataka Orissa, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Our experience and expertise can also help African countries and neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

## THE NEXT 25 YEARS.

25 years ago, we started a small effort trying to make a difference in our way. However, our journey has taught us that anything and everything is possible if you have the right intention and are willing to put in the effort. Our dream of a day when nobody suffers from a back problem due to lack of money and resources, is a feasible and achievable task. We at The Spine Foundation are taking this as an opportunity to rededicate ourselves in making this possible.



# THE SPINE FOUNDATION FAQs

## Where can I know more about the work done by The Spine Foundation?

You can visit our website [www.spinefoundation.org.in](http://www.spinefoundation.org.in) or follow us on social media whose details are listed below.

## Whom do I contact to make a donation to The Spine Foundation?

You can call Mr Mahesh Palan on 9819826244 or email him on *<thespinefoundation365@gmail com>*

## What are your bank details?

Account Holder: The Spine Foundation  
Bank: Union Bank of India,  
Bandra Pali Hill Branch, Mumbai  
Savings Account No: **315602010576857**  
IFSC code: **UBIN 0531561**



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