

## DOCTOR'S SPEAK

### 20 years of Liver Transplantation in India

Smita Malhotra, *Pediatric Gastroenterologist and Hepatologist, Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals*

Anupam Sibal, *Pediatric Gastroenterologist and Hepatologist and Group Medical Director, Apollo Hospitals Group*

Neerav Goyal, *Liver Transplant Surgeon, Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals*

Liver transplantation (LT) is now well-established therapy for children in India with acute liver failure, end-stage liver disease and a variety of metabolic disorders. This treatment modality has transformed the outcomes of these conditions that hitherto carried a grave and dismal prognosis. Although LT has now evolved in India, this wasn't the case two decades ago.

The first successful pediatric liver transplantation was performed in India at Apollo Hospitals in Delhi in November 1998. Sanjay Kandasamy, a 20-month old baby with Biliary Atresia underwent a living related liver transplant with his father as the donor. It has been 20 years since Sanjay's liver transplantation and he is leading a normal life as a third-year medical student aspiring to become a surgeon. He was featured on the cover of 'The Week' magazine when he completed 15 years post-transplantation. The Government of India released a postage stamp in that year as well to commemorate 15 years of liver transplantation.

The 20-year journey of liver transplantation has been daunting and the initial few years were full of challenges. Initially, LT was regarded as experimental, children requiring LT were often referred late, as guidelines regarding referral were not available. Most of the children who merited an LT belonged to families with less privileged economic backgrounds and hence could not afford expensive treatment.

Financial constraints continue to be the biggest limiting factor for children in need of liver transplantation. Many charities and crowdfunding programmes have actively helped families save their children by raising funds for their transplantation. Major centres across India have come forward and offered discounted packages in an attempt to make paediatric liver transplantation more affordable. LT in India remains largely living-related where a close relative, preferably either of the parents, donates a part of their liver to the recipient.

Over the years, successful outcomes and improved awareness have resulted in the establishment of liver transplantation programs in the country. With modern surgical advancements and better intensive care, results are gratifying. With 5-year survival rate close to 90%, India has now become a major center for LT for international patients because of the high quality - low-cost value proposition.

The Apollo Liver Transplantation Program has performed more than 3300 liver transplantations in patients from 50 countries, of which 325 have been children. Age and size are no longer barriers as babies as young as 6 months have been transplanted. Excellent survival figures have been reported in children weighing less than 7.5 kg.

With the increasing acceptance of LT amongst the medical community and the public at large, there is now potential for the number of liver transplants to increase significantly so as to offer hope to the thousands of children who suffer from liver failure.

### **BENEFICIARY'S STORY**

It was 21 June 2018, when the New Delhi based Sharma\* family was blessed with a beautiful daughter. Soon after her birth, Geeta\* was diagnosed with Jaundice. The doctor assured that she would be fine within a few weeks as it is commonly observed. Prolonged jaundice worried her parents and they decided to go for another round of consultation. It was at this point when they learnt that the 3-month-old was suffering from liver cirrhosis and only liver transplantation can cure her.

The Sharma family visited some major liver transplant hospitals in New Delhi only to find that the surgery is very expensive. Coming from a humble background with low income, they were unable to bear the high costs for the transplantation. They were in need of money and the family was already running out of resources when they came to Max Hospital, Saket where they discovered the availability of funding through The Pravin Agarwal Foundation and Crowdfunding organisations.

With the help of financial aid received in time, the operation was successful and Geeta is about to celebrate her first birthday. Her mother, Sheetal Sharma, was the donor, and is now all well and happy to see her daughter speak her first words. The Arora family is thankful and deeply moved by the humanity that still exists in this world.



•names changed to protect patient identity

## UPDATES

- Peer Support Group

The Pravin Agarwal Foundation (TPAF) has created a Support Group of families/caregivers of children who suffer from Liver Disease. This group is a platform to share experiences and concerns, provide **emotional and social support** one another in the liver transplantation journey and obtain information from the experts in the field. We welcome all members of the medical fraternity and patient community interested to be a part of our group. Click here to join us! **[Insert link to the facebook peer support group]**

- TPAF at PEDICON in Bengaluru, June 2019



*Dr. Sonal Asthana addressed the members of the IAP, Bengaluru chapter to further TPAF's mission to make paediatric liver transplantations more affordable and accessible*

- TPAF's 2nd annual roundtable conference 'Affordable Liver Transplants Conclave 2019' involving the key stakeholders of the paediatric liver transplantation ecosystem to be held on 2nd August in Mumbai. **[Insert an infographic/banner representing the roundtable]**

**[LINK 1 OR 2 SOCIAL MEDIA POST (BANNER/INFOGRAPHIC/BLOG) WITH HIGHEST IMPRESSIONS]**