

Every little heart counts here

Foundation Provides Surgeries To Poor In Southern States At Affordable Rates

Yamini Nair | TNN

In India, 90% of heart patients cannot afford a surgery. The irony is that almost all diseases that affect the heart are surgically curable. Then why should people die of heart ailments? This thought inspired some like-minded people to join hands for Needy Heart Foundation (NHF).

"When I was on holiday from my assignment with the United Nations, my children asked me why I wanted to work for money at that age. 'We would like you to follow your dream now,' they told me. That is where it all started," says O P Khanna, an engineer by profession, and founder-member of NHF. He joined hands with the heads of cardiac surgery in Manipal Hospital to work for charity and thus was born Needy Heart Foundation, in 2001. The foundation now provides care for poor heart patients in the four southern states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Why did they choose this as their area of service? "It was in our line of work and heartcare in India is costly. We know it better and wanted to do justice to a small segment



WE COME FIRST: The foundation says children are citizens of the future

NEEDY HEART FOUNDATION

Address: 5th Floor, Manipal Towers
Old Airport Road, Bangalore
Phone: 080-30501845

of people by doing something we are passionate about," says Dr Devananda NS, another trust member. "We chose hospitals which would cut down cost to a bare minimum and Manipal agreed.

At the time, the base cost of a heart surgery was Rs 65,000, which included only medicines and paramedical services, because doctors had agreed to surgeries for free," says Khanna. "Rotary came to our help six years ago. They are giving Rs 30,000 per patient now. The social work department of hospitals also pitch in," he adds. What started with three to four surgeries a year has 365 surgeries lined up now, of which

255 are already over. As future citizens of the country, NHF gives preference to children. "My son had a defect in his heart since birth. When he turned 9, a surgery was unavoidable. NHF's helping hand was like a divine intervention for us," says Praveen Kumar of Yeshwantpur, whose son Hitesh underwent surgery in December 2010.

The foundation is not alone in its endeavour. Hospitals like Manipal, Jayadeva, Columbia Asia, Mahaveer Jain and Fortis have come together for the noble cause. "We have signed an MoU with Ramaiah too," says Khanna. What's the criteria for selecting a patient? "Earlier, we used to depend on a letter from an MLA or MLC or a panchayat head about the patient. After rampant corruption taken by government departments, we stopped it. Now presidents of Rotary Clubs are authorized to refer patients," says Khanna. NHF conducted 42 heart camps in different parts of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh through Rotary Clubs.

"Ten per cent of our patients are from neighbouring countries like Pakistan and Indonesia," adds Khanna. NHF extends its services to other areas as well. It has secretaries, all of whom are paraplegic or physically challenged. They are trained in computers and spoken English.

(Tell us about similar initiatives at toibl:reporter@timesgroup.com with 'City of Angels' as the subject)

