

High costs, long waiting list trouble transplant recipients

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BENGALURU, DHNS: The last thing that Pushpa Raj (46), who had been suffering from jaundice, remembered was the plasma shooting into her veins at a hospital before the world went dark.

When she woke up 15 days later in February 2018, the jaundice had lifted and a large bandage occupied a place on her abdomen. Even more shocking to her was the sight of her 20-year-old son, Bharath, lying in the bed next to her, dressed in hospital blues, with an equally large bandage on his abdomen.

Family members informed



Bharath Raj, the donor, with his mother Pushpa.

Pushpa that she had suffered acute liver failure, prompting medical staff to launch a desperate bid to find a donor.

When those efforts failed, her son had volunteered to donate part of his liver.

"I couldn't believe what I

was being told," Puspha told *DH*. "I was ninety percent gone, but my son saved my life. There is no greater gift he could have given me," she said, describing her new lease of life as a "miracle."

Pushpa's case is reflective of the larger problem of a shortage of donors in the state, said Dr Ravichand Siddachari of Manipal Hospitals who helped treat Pushpa. "The majority of organ transplants in South India is accomplished through living donors, with cadaver donors constituting 30%," he explained.

That ratio needs to change, according to Dr Kishore Phadke, Convenor of Jeevasrtheke, a government body con-

stituted to facilitate cadaver donor transplants. "In 2018, we had 90 donors. Since January 1, we have already had 35 donors," he said but clarified that while the rise in number of donors looks promising, they are actually stacked up against such figures as 2,000 patients waiting for a kidney transplant, 500 people waiting for new livers and over 5,200 people waiting for a new heart.

"What must happen is that we must get more cadaver donors," he added and said the government, in an effort to increase organ donation, has appointed grief counselors at ICUs across the state.

The cost of surgery is another

hurdle, added Pushpa's husband, Seven Raj, a real-estate agent. "Initially, we were told that the cost would be Rs 25 lakh, but the bill showed Rs 35 lakh," he said, adding that such prices place transplants out of the reach of the poor.

The government, which has recognised the high costs, has formulated a scheme under the Suvarna Arogya Trust to help the poor avail treatment at highly reasonable costs. "Under the new scheme, the costs of surgery for a kidney transplant for BPL families will be Rs 2-3 lakh and about Rs 10-11 lakh for a liver transplant," Dr Phadke said.

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