



'Elephant man' gets rid of 22-year-old face tumour at Delhi hospital

Durgesh Nandan Jha | TNN | Updated: Nov 13, 2014, 03:18 IST

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NEW DELHI: Lalit Ram was in a strange predicament for 22 years—till he underwent a rare surgery for removal of a large facial tumour that looked like an elephant's trunk. While some worshipped him, thinking he was an incarnation of Lord Ganesh, others found his deformed face repulsive.

But no one understood the mental agony and pain he suffered because of the tumour, which affects a minuscule percentage of people across the world.

"The tumour started growing rapidly when I was 10 years old and soon it covered the chin, ears and a part of the chest. Children were scared of me and the elderly, including Brahmins, thronged to seek my blessings—I told them "sadaa sukhi raho" (stay happy forever)," said the 24-year-old, a resident of Madhubani in Bihar.

Ram remained confined to a cattle-shed for nearly a decade, years before his case was highlighted in a global TV series that described him as "India's elephant man". He was offered free surgery by Sir Ganga Ram Hospital here.

"We were no less shocked to see the patient when he came to our hospital in September 2012. His MRI and CT angiography revealed that Ram was suffering from the most acute form of neurofibromatosis, a condition in which tumour develops on or under the skin and along the nerves," said Dr Vivek Kumar, consultant, plastic surgery at the hospital.

He said it took nearly eight hours to remove the tumour and one month of stay for post-operative care. "The tumour was rooted in the blood vessels as well as nerves of the face and the neck, which put him at a high risk of paralysis and death due to bleeding. We performed the surgery under magnification to preserve vital vessels and nerves, and arranged adequate blood to deal with any emergency," said the doctor.

During the surgery, doctors successfully excised two-third of the tumour—the overhanging growth on the right side of the face. "While operating upon him, the tumor was found to be more vascular than expected. There was extensive bleeding; medications and repeated transfusions couldn't prevent his blood pressure from falling to a dangerous level. We decided to abandon the procedure after eight hours to save his life," Dr

Kumar said. The surgery, he added, was planned in a way that the face is not disfigured and the cut marks stay hidden below it.

"We managed to find a bride for him and got him married recently. He is happy and helping his father in farming," said Budhni Devi, the patient's mother.

Dr D S Rana, chairman, board of management at Sir Ganga Ram, said patients like Ram are denied treatment due to poverty and little awareness. "We hope this case would serve as an example for the many facing stigma and discrimination due to similar medical issues. I am pleased that our efforts were successful and he is married and rehabilitated," said Dr Rana.

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