



In city hospital, brain pacemaker keeps Parkinson's at bay

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FOR EIGHT long years, Ravish Rastogi had been an unwilling recluse in his home. In the stranglehold of Parkinson's disease, this former employee of the Steel Authority of India Limited was afraid he would be attacked by the increasingly frequent symptoms of muscle rigidity and tremors. He had also let go of his passion for writing poetry. But at 65 today and a rare operation later, Rastogi is back to writing and confident of meeting people. The surgery, called the 'deep brain stimulation', was per-

formed on him by Dr Sandeep Vaishya, head of Neurosurgery at the Max Super Speciality Hospital. The treatment 'deep brain stimulation' is a surgical procedure in which a battery-operated medical device called the brain pacemaker is implanted to send electrical impulses to target areas of the brain that control movement. This stimulation blocks the abnormal nerve signals that cause Parkinson's disease. The symptoms of the disease are then slowly disarmed. Vaishya said: "Rastogi has Parkinson's for 12 years. The drugs were of no use to him. He could not go about his daily activities and needed constant supervision."

Though the option has been available for some years now, doctors do not recommend surgery to treat this chronic and progressive disease, sources in the medical profession said. Statistics show that only 700 such surgeries have been performed in the whole of south Asia in the last 12 years. But Dr Vaishya believes that the option of surgery should be exercised a little early. Unlike previous procedures to treat Parkinson's, this particular surgery does not damage healthy brain tissue by destroying nerve cells, doctors said. Consultant neurologist at Max, Dr Puneet Agarwal said many do not prefer the procedure because of the high costs in-

involved. Agarwal said: "It costs around Rs 6 lakh in a private set-up." Dr Vaishya, who has operated on patients from Afghanistan, Iraq and Oman, feels the procedure gives them back quality life. He said: "Younger patients tend to show better results but 80 to 85 per cent respond well to the procedure." Rastogi's wife Roopa said the surgery had turned their life around. "He is back to writing, sports and everything he did before he was diagnosed," she said. Thirty-seven-year-old Bashir Ahmed from Iraq underwent the surgery on March 8. He had an early onset of the disease and is recovering well, Dr Vaishya said.



Post-operation: Bashir Ahmed from Iraq and Dr Sandeep Vaishya
AMIT MEHRA

The disease

- Parkinson's is a disorder of the nervous system that affects a person's motor skills. The disease progressively gets worse, causing muscle rigidity of limbs and joints, slowing down and then stopping movement altogether, tremors, impaired balance and coordination.
- Nearly 2 million are affected by Parkinson's in India.
- Approximately 3 lakh require surgery, doctors have said.