

# Organ transplants could save the day

Durgesh Nandan Jha | TNN

Life has become uncertain for 36-year-old entrepreneur Sunder Rajan, who's been living with a diseased heart for over a year. Despite regular medication, his health continues to deteriorate. And though heart transplant is an option, finding a matching donor remains elusive. The otherwise cheerful person and a geek, who once dreamt of settling abroad, is now waiting for the final call.

"I have been taking medicines to keep my heart going but there is no improvement. Doctors say my heart muscles are weak and I require a transplant. Not only is there no donor, I cannot afford the

high cost of treatment and post-operative care," says a despondent Rajan. A heart transplant patient has to undergo various tests. Immuno-suppressants, taken to prevent rejection of the organ, can cost about Rs 2 lakh.

In a country where over 60 million suffer from coronary disease, heart transplants are abysmally low. "Scarcity of donors is the biggest reason," says cardiac surgeon Dr P Venugopal, who performed the first heart transplant in India in 1994. He doesn't think high costs stop people from going in for a heart transplant, as some hospitals such as the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) provide free treatment. This former director of AIIMS says that



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less than 60 heart transplants have been performed in India in the last 16 years.

The need for transplants is acute. Dr Viveka Kumar, director of interventional cardiology at Delhi's Max hospital has some 15 patients waiting for a donor. "We gave

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them all types of medications and tried out different treatments such as bypass, surgery and angioplasty, but there was no improvement. The only hope now is transplants," he says.

The crisis of donors can be overcome if awareness about ca-

naver donation is spread, says Dr A K Bisoi, senior cardiac surgeon at AIIMS. His colleague, Dr Sudhir Gupta, assistant professor of forensic medicine, believes that "certain amendments to the Human Organ Transplant Act 1994 are required to enhance cadaver-heart-retrieval. These include: widening the definition of 'near relatives' by allowing organ swaps among needy families; simplifying cadaver transplant procedures and relaxing the current age limit of 60 for heart cadaver donors."

He adds it should be made mandatory for ICUs to declare all brain deaths and register them with an online central organ registry for better coordination, retrieval and transplantation.