

Indian-origin surgeon conducts Oz's first kidney & pancreas transplant on type 2 diabetes patient, 39-year-old now diabetes-free

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MELBOURNE: An Indian-origin surgeon at the Royal Adelaide Hospital — South Australia's largest public hospital — has led a team of doctors that performed the country's first simultaneous kidney and pancreas transplant on a type 2 diabetes patient. Previously, the combined kidney and pancreas procedure has only been possible for patients with type 1 diabetes.

Shantanu Bhattachajya, who hails from Kanpur (UP), told TOI that his team of four performed the surgery in June but it was made public by the hospital on July 27. The patient, a 39-year-old man who was on dialysis since 2018, is now diabetes-free and has joined work

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In type 2 diabetes, the body is unable to use insulin — a hormone produced by pancreas — to turn glucose into energy, leading to glucose build-up in the blood.

Transplanting a kidney and pancreas simultaneously allowed the pancreas to bring the patient's blood sugar under control while it will help the new kidney last longer, said Bhattachajya, senior consultant transplant and general surgeon at the hospital. "The idea was to give the patient healthy organs to manage his blood sugar level. Him being diabetes-free was a positive outcome of the procedure," he said.

This is not the first time the 51-year-old transplant surgeon has scripted history. In 2008, he had performed India's first live donor pancreas and kidney transplant at a private hospital in Bengaluru. "It was a first-of-its-kind surgery in the country as usually donated organs are extracted from the deceased. In this case, the donor was alive. He was the father of the girl who needed the transplant," he said.

For the latest surgery, the team had to wait for over a year as the patient needed to find a matching donor. What also made the surgery possible was the fact that Adelaide has a unique immunosuppressive transplant drug regimen which doesn't use the synthetic corticosteroid drugs that can worsen glucose intolerance and are not suitable for patients with type 2 diabetes, according to Bhattarchajya.

It helped matters that the patient was in good health. "This patient was also suitable because of his low insulin requirement, young age, overall health and fitness," said the surgeon, adding that such a multi-organ procedure for a type 2 diabetes patient has been conducted in other parts of the world, but was a first for Australia.

According to Bhattarchajya, the success of the surgery has sparked hope of treatment for other suitable patients with type 2 diabetes.