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Telangana hospitals get a hang of lung transplants

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By [Donita Jose](#)

Express News Service

HYDERABAD: The year 2020 may have been grim for the non-Covid medical and health services, but one service which was in high demand was that of lung transplantation. Telangana reported 20 lung transplants last year, more than double of the nine conducted in 2019, according to the statistics of the Jeevandan Cadaver Organ Transplant Programme. In fact, this has been the highest since the programme started in 2013.

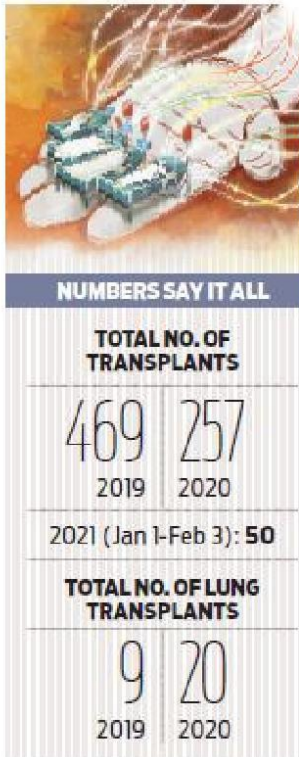
This is being seen as a major achievement, considering the extreme difficulties faced in organ transplantation amid a lockdown and fear of the pandemic. The average turnaround time had also increased due to the requirement for Covid-19 negative reports. Experts attribute this to a demand-side increase, with an increase in lung-related issues owing to Covid-19, which is making more patients need lungs, but also on the expertise the State is gaining in medical optimisation of a braindead individual, allowing steady supply. “The demand for the organ had shot up as there were more cases of lung damage caused by Covid-19. This has helped hospitals to become more optimised to handle brain death and salvage all organs,” Dr G Swarnalatha, in-charge of Jeevandan, said.

She explains that with increasing awareness, hospitals are able to detect brain death early on. When a patient is declared braindead, the body becomes unstable and the organs start to deteriorate. Hospitals are focusing on maintaining the organs, including the lungs, until the family consents for donation and the recipient is ready.

Dr Sandeep Attawar, chair and director of Thoracic Organ Transplants and Assist Devices at KIMS Heart & Lung Transplant Institute, echoes similar thoughts. “While it is true that Covid-19 increased the need of lung transplantations, hospitals have also improved in the entire optimisation process — be it a better selection of a recipient candidate who is likely to have better outcomes or stronger organ and donor management,” he said.

Emerging transplant hub

Dr Attawar and his team conducted nearly 10 lung transplants last year, two of which were recipients from Telangana and the remaining from other States. All of them were patients with post-Covid complications. Apollo Hospitals, Yashoda Hospitals and Global Hospital, too, have been amping up transplantation services for liver, kidney, heart and pancreas, among other organs. “As things normalise with lower caseload, we hope that Telangana becomes the best State when it comes to organ transplantations. Already, the State is having high donation numbers but going forward, if more hospitals optimise their donors, especially in government hospitals, Telangana will be able to emerge as a leader in this as well,” Dr Attawar said.



Signs of recovery

Just one month into the new year, the organ transplantation services are showing positive signs of recovery. Telangana clocked nearly 50 donations from January 1 to February 3. As per statistics from the Jeevandan Organ Donation Programme, which facilitates the donations in the State, families of 14 donors gave their consent for organ donation, following which nearly 50 organs were harvested. This is already one-fifth of all the transplantations seen in 2020 when organ donation services had taken a massive hit.

“In 2020, both the on-demand and supply sides saw a shortfall. Since hospitals were focusing on Covid-19, transplants were put on hold. Even if they wanted to resume the services, the availability of organs was low due to the lockdown. There were fewer accidents and injuries leading to brain deaths,” Dr Swarnalatha said. In 2020, nearly 257 organs were donated by 75 individuals.