

MUMBAIKARS JOIN HANDS WITH TATA MEMORIAL'S ADOPT-A-PATIENT INITIATIVE TO HELP 45 KIDS IN NEED

YOU TOO CAN SAVE A KID'S LIFE



JINESH MEHTA,
Interior Designer

Shreecharan Mehta, 9,
acute lymphoblastic leukemia

Shreecharan needs RS 4 lakh for his treatment, which is going to last for two years. He is one of the 15 children Ghatkopar based interior designer Jinesh Mehta has adopted.

"We fund treatments, and are also looking at needs like accommodation and daily expenditure to motivate them to continue the treatment," says Jinesh, who has done this for over a year, with help from eight friends and two siblings.

All stories don't have happy endings. Jinesh's first adoptee was a seven-year-old boy suffering from leukaemia whose father could not even afford to buy a train or bus ticket. The boy lost his life while undergoing the treatment.

"I cannot completely wipe out their miseries but I can try to make some difference in their life. As soon as I get to know about a patient in need of help, I circulate messages within my group and funds start coming in," he said.



CHILDREN'S CANCER CARE

Crowd-funded initiative

Hanadi Ali Kasem Ahmed, 14,
Acute Myeloid Leukaemia

Hanadi was brought to Tata in July 2014 when all options for treatment in her native Yemen had been exhausted. As a foreign national, Hanadi could not access any of the funds disbursed through the hospital's usual channels. Hanadi's chemotherapy continued for eight months, and even when it was time for her to return to Yemen, she was sent home with six months of medicines.

"The group collected over Rs 6 lakh for her treatment with the help of friends and relatives and continues to fund her as we have to courier her medicines to Yemen," said Jatia.

"There were a lot of language problems. They even arranged for a translator," she added.

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Tata memorial's paediatric care department has 1,800 new admissions a year. That's 1,800 children under 15 that are diagnosed with cancer – most often a form of leukaemia. Dr Shripad Banavali, head of pediatric and medical oncology says that 70 per cent of paediatric cancers are completely curable. But treatment usually costs in the vicinity of Rs 4 lakh, and that figure can easily soar upward.

While many of these children have families that are entirely incapable of taking on the burden of such a sum, there are avenues of relief available – if they can access them. As is the norm, the poorest of the poor often don't have the necessary documentation to take advantage of formalised processes.

But Tata Memorial, the only oncological specialty hospital in the state, has begun a new norm. Two years ago an individual, who chooses to remain unnamed, came up to them asking if he could adopt one patient at a time and help to fund treatment, under his crowd funding initiative called Children's Cancer Care. The ImpacT Foundation set up the

'Adopt-a-Patient' initiative, which co-ordinates between the adopter and adoptee "When we approach charitable trusts, it takes at least 15 days to get some funds. But our individual donors donate within 2-3 days – a cost certificate and disease summary from the hospital is enough proof. Cheques are given in the name of the hospital to ensure transparency," said Shalini Jatia, secretary of ImpacT.

This, clubbed with other efforts by Tata hospital like providing accommodation, nutrition and education to paediatric patients has drastically reduced the dropout rate to 4.8 per cent from 25 per cent three years ago. "We had many patients dropping out of treatment due to lack of funds. We are thus trying to bring in a holistic approach by providing all the needs of such poor patients," said Dr Banavali.

While some donors pay from their pocket, others have convinced relatives and friends to also contribute to the cause. And till now, 45 children with cancer, in dire straits, have received the help they need from generous and compassionate givers.



BHAVISHA SHAH
Theater Owner

Sahiba Khatoun, 4, Bone Cancer

4-year old Sahiba Khatoun has already partially lost a limb to cancer. Little Sahiba is from Masjid Bunder and her father is a daily-wage worker who cannot afford even a fraction of her treatment.

But Bhavisha Shah is determined she will win the final battle. She is one of four children Bhavisha has adopted, since she heard of the initiative eight months ago.

A 37-year-old theatre owner, Bhavisha has seen the tragedies unfold up close. Her first adoptee, a 4-year-old boy suffering from hip cancer succumbed to the disease two-and-a-half months after she started to fund his treatment.

"But I was so attached to that child that I decided to adopt more," said the Napean Sea road resident. "I try to fund their other needs like accommodation and food as well," said Shah. "For me, it's like I am helping for the treatment for my family member. The feeling is priceless.



SHILPI MEHTA
Theater Producer

Sabrin Shaikh, 4, Burkitt's Lymphoma

Four-year-old Sabrin Shaikh was brought to Parel's Tata Memorial hospital from Sangamner, after she was diagnosed with Burkitt's lymphoma – the fastest growing human tumour, which is rapidly fatal if left untreated. When her parents learned that the year-long treatment could cost up to Rs 2.5 lakh they almost turned back. "We couldn't have afforded to treat her. My husband barely makes money for us to eat," said Sabrin's mother Shabana. Her husband sells utensils in Pune.

Sabrin is one of the five cancer affected children

that Shilpi and Jay Mehta, a couple from Malabar Hill, adopted over the year. "When we went to the hospital, we realised that there are so many patients in need. It gives us immense satisfaction to bring a smile of these children's face," said Shilpi, a theater producer. Her husband Jay works at a pharmaceutical firm, and they have now spread the good word, recruiting friends and relatives to this cause.

"We will be forever grateful to [them]," says Shabana, adding that accommodation, food and clothing has all been taken care by the adopter.



ALKA SIDDIQUI
Chef

Vishal Vishwakarma, 11,
Blood Cancer

Young Vishal Vishwakarma's father is a daily-wager with an uncertain income and utterly unable to afford his son's treatment.

47 year-old chef from Bandra, Alka Shehzeen Siddiqui adopted Vishal, and another 8-year-old girl suffering from blood cancer. "People from remote areas come to Tata Hospital but they don't know how to get funds and whom to approach. Many patients leave treatment half way," said Siddiqui. Chemotherapy is currently on-going and she is prepared to fund the adoptees till their treatment is complete, but she wants to be able to do more than just give money.

"I also support a few cancer patients with nutritional support by providing them a mixture of dry fruits," said Siddiqui, since food is her area of expertise. Every little bit counts, and she hopes that more people come forward to donate whatever they can, so children's lives can be saved.