

TATA MEMORIAL CENTRE

TATA MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

AND

ADVANCED CENTRE FOR THE TREATMENT, RESEARCH & EDUCATION IN CANCER

Dr. Girish Chinnaswamy

MD (Paed), MRCP (Paeds), MD (UK)

Assistant Professor, Pediatric Oncology

Department of Medical Oncology

Dr. Ernest Borges Road,

Parel, Mumbai - 400 012. INDIA



Tel : 022 2417 7000, Ext : 4175

Fax : 2414 6937

Email: girish.c.tmh@gmail.com

October 24th 2017

Helping hands: Giving a Roof, Safety & Life to children suffering with Cancer

Every year, 2500 children are treated at TMH of which 80% can be cured with appropriate treatment. Of these, 90% come from outside Mumbai. Majority of them stay back for treatment at Mumbai and few are referred to local centres and followed-up regularly. The average length of stay ranges from 5-12 months. At anytime, 800-1000 children are actively taking treatment and require good and clean accommodation in Mumbai. The quality of accommodation is extremely important as these children are on intensive chemotherapy, which leads to poor immunity and very high risk of developing serious infections. Any infection in these children can be life threatening since not only it can kill the child, but lead to interruptions in treatment, putting them at high risk of relapse and death due to cancer. In a survey done in 2014, by our social service team, we found that there are approximately 400 beds/rooms available to cancer kids in the city, but of these, only 300 are of decent quality. The remaining 100 beds are in shared, extremely unhygienic dormitory facilities, which, in past, have led to life threatening infections in children staying there. Unfortunately, many of the poor families unable to afford the paid expensive accommodations in the vicinity of the hospital are forced to abandon therapy or stay on the footpath in the initial period leading to infections and death. **It is known worldwide that lack of accommodation near the treating cancer centre is one of the prime reason of treatment refusal and abandonment of therapy of childhood cancer in developing countries.**

Our centre is already at the forefront of providing holistic care to these highly curable children (such as financial adoption, nutritional, emotional, transfusion support) which has reduced our abandonment in last 5 years from >20% to 5% saving lives and preventing death of at least 300 children every year. After analyzing the major reasons for families refusing treatment for their children, we realized that accommodation problem was a major reason for abandonment of treatment. Most of the families are so poor that they cannot pay a minimum charge of Rs. 100-150 a day for the least expensive dharamshalas.

To address this unmet need, in October 2013 we tied up with Helping Hands founded by Miss Madhavi Goenka. Helping Hands has been providing us funds, which goes towards accommodation support. This goes directly to the dharamshalas and we provide Helping Hands with dharamshala receipts.

They are providing us with reimbursement for the families. Through this program we are providing reimbursement for 150 families every month.

We have been able to provide many families with peaceful nights of stay in a safe, secure and clean accommodation centre in Mumbai. Getting accommodation at a good clean place helped them in continuing treatment as well as preventing infections thereby preventing the death of

these children due to cancer or its complications. We are highly grateful to Helping Hands and would continue to look forward to more support from them for this important cause.

Supporting the Survivor Patients

As the number of children diagnosed with cancer increases and progress is made in successfully treating the disease, the population of cancer survivors is also increasing. Due to chemotherapy and radiation which children with cancer receive during their treatment they need to be monitored for side effects, which can occur over time.

Drawing inspiration from the model of care established at St. Jude Children Research Hospital, USA, a follow-up clinic for long term survivors of childhood cancer was initiated at Tata Memorial Hospital in February 1991. This clinic was named After Completion of Therapy (ACT) clinic.

From Feb 1991 till now more than 1700 survivors have been enrolled in ACT clinic. These survivors are followed up regularly in a systematic manner.

The aims of the clinic are

- ❖ To monitor growth, development & sexual maturation of survivors
- ❖ To monitor late effects of therapy (Functioning of heart, kidneys etc)
- ❖ To address psycho-social problems of the survivors (marriage, infertility and many such problems)
- ❖ Rehabilitation for useful productive adulthood
- ❖ To provide feed back for future protocol modification to obviate/minimize late effects

Since 2016, Helping Hands supports us towards the funds for these patients, for their investigations, growth hormone, and other medicines.

Bereavement Support

In spite of our best efforts there are a few children whom we lose each year to Cancer. "Bereavement", a period of grief, for the loss of a loved one! We at Tata Memorial Hospital need support to make sure that the child lost is given last rites according to the wishes of their parents. Some prefer to do the rites in Mumbai itself and some prefer to take the bodies home. We offer complete or partial support depending upon the needs of the family.

The average costs are Rs. 2000 to Rs. 8000 per patient depending upon the distance to be travelled.

Local support costs an average of Rs. 600/-

Helping hands is taking care of the entire bereavement support program of pediatrics since 2017 January.



Dr Girish Chinnaswamy

Dr. Girish Chinnaswamy, MD, MRCP
Associate Professor
Paediatric Oncology
Tata Memorial Hospital, Mumbai