Op gets woman with rare spinal condition back on feet

Sumitra Deb Roy | TNN

Mumbai: Unable to either stand straight or even lie down properly, 30-year-old Marasi Ganpati would be confined to her one-room home in Dharavi. But thanks to a "daring surgery" performed by doctors at Sion Hospital, she can finally hope for a "normal life", after being cured of a rare genetic spinal condition that affects one in million.

Termed Myositis Ossificans Progressivia, it is a rare spinal condition in which the soft muscle tissues turn into tough bones. In Marasi's case, the condition had led to her vertebrae—which make up the spine or backbone—to harden and fuse with each other. The condition changed her posture, forcing Marasi to start walking with a stoop. Eventually, her body became bent at an angle of 90 degrees, not allowing her to stand erect, walk straight or lie down properly for the past six years.

Recalling the misery that Marasi had to go through, her sister Paichitai Thevar said, "As her posture became increasingly awkward, she could no longer sleep straight. She would have to sleep with her legs folded. She felt so embarrassed because of her condition that she would not even look at anyone while talking." Taking Marasi to a witchdoctor had also crossed the family's mind but they finally decided otherwise; being referred from other hospitals, they took her to civic-run Sion Hospital, which is the only public hospital to run an advanced spine deformity centre.

Doctors there diagnosed Marasi with the rare condition and chose to perform "a daring surgery on her". The operation, said professor and spine surgeon Dr Ashok Rathod, entailed a great deal of risk as a single wrong move could render a patient paraplegic for life. "We performed a spinal osteotomy, during which a wedge of bone from the deformed spine is taken out. The spine is then reconstructed in normal physiological alignment and fixed with screws and rods to stabilize it," he explained.

Rathod said both the cause and treatment of the condition remained tricky. "While most of the times, the reasons causing the condition remain vague, many times it is initiated by trauma or infection like tuberculosis," he said. Marasi did have a history of tuberculosis, but Dr Rathod said it was difficult to relate the two.

After being operated upon in November, Marasi has since been recuperating at the hospital. But she can now stand erect and even walk straight with a little help. Marsai still need several sessions of physiotherapy for complete recovery, but all that Marasi now looks forward to is going home as the doctors have promised to discharge her in the next few days.

MEDICAL FACTS

- The disorder usually manifests between the time of birth and **10 years** but on rare occasions, it may occur later

- By the second decade of life, patients start showing stiffness of spine and shoulder and impeded movement of hip. The bone formation often leads to stiffness of adjacent joints, and the condition can prove fatal in some cases

- By the **age of 30**, most patients are rendered bed-ridden or have impaired mobility. Their bodies adapt strange postures
- Very few cases of **Myositis ossificans progressivia of spine** have been recorded in the Indian medical literature

MYOSITIS OSSIFICANS PROGRESSIVIA is a rare genetic condition in which tissues, muscles and ligaments turn into bones

Marasi Ganpati couldn't stand or lie down straight before the surgery