

Touched by transplants: The gift of Life

Words by : The Executives India

Pioneering itself in multi-transplant operations in the country, Global Gleneagles Hospitals has come a long way from its initial establishment.

With its presence in Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad and Bangalore, and a bedding capacity of over 2000, the multi-specialty group of hospitals also offers tertiary and quaternary healthcare services.

Dr. Vivek Talulikat, CEO of Gleneagles Global Hospitals gave us a first-hand view of its progression and breakthrough as one of the leading multi-organ transplant hospitals in the country.

Before coming to Global Hospitals, Dr. Vivek was the Executive Officer and Chief Operating Officer of Sterling Hospitals, which has 6 hospitals, including two cancer hospitals and four multi-specialty hospitals spanning across Gujarat. When asked why he made the shift to Global hospitals, he said that he considered the role quite challenging compared to his previous role where he had been COO for the last 7 years.

"Global Hospitals was a big change for me from Ahmadabad to Mumbai. Heading a hospital in a metropolis is a different challenge altogether. I already knew that Global hospitals was a transplant dedicated hospital being very well known for its transplant operations. When I came here the hospital already had a solid foundation and I think it

was also one of the busiest transplant operating units in the city and western India. The first thing I felt was that the foundation was good enough so we could start something new."

Global hospitals were already known for their liver and kidney transplants back then. Dr. Vivek had a clear goal in mind to expand the hospital's portfolio and was able to bring in a lung transplant team successfully within the first three months of his undertaking of the hospital as CEO.

The first lung transplant in Mumbai and western India took place in Gleneagles Global Hospitals in 2019.

Since then, they have successfully conducted around 14 lung transplants, he says, till the pandemic slowed down their progression in March.

"It was a new edition of organ transplants to our hospital services and it was something that this part of the country did not have access to. People used to go to Chennai for this and now it has been made available over here as well. Apart from this, we also do heart transplants by then and so it kind of became a multi-organ transplant centre doing all sorts of

transplants in Mumbai."

During May of 2019, the hospital started a Pediatric Liver Transplant program for children. Previously they had been more focused on the liver program for adults, however, this new venture garnered a lot of attention he says, with 13 successful transplants amongst which the last three surgeries took place between May and June.

"Despite the ongoing pandemic, we were allowed to continue the pediatric liver transplant operations considering it was an emergency surgery for children. Thinking back to it, the existing lung transplant program, adult liver transplant program and the current pediatric liver transplant venture was great for the positioning of our hospital in the city. As of The first lung transplant in Mumbai and western India took place in Gleneagles Global Hospitals in 2019.

Since then, they have successfully conducted around 14 lung transplants, he says, till the pandemic slowed down their progression in March.

"It was a new edition of organ transplants to our hospital services and it was something that this part of the country did not have access to. People used to go

Dr. Vivek Talulikat
(CEO)

Global Gleneagles Hospitals

to Chennai for this and now it has been made available over here as well. Apart from this, we also do heart transplants by then and so it kind of became a multi-organ transplant centre doing all sorts of transplants in Mumbai.”

During May of 2019, the hospital started a Pediatric Liver Transplant program for children. Previously they had been more focused on the liver program for adults, however, this new venture garnered a lot of attention he says, with 13 successful transplants amongst which the last three surgeries took place between May and June.

“Despite the ongoing pandemic, we were allowed to continue the pediatric liver transplant operations considering it was an emergency surgery for children. Thinking back to it, the existing lung transplant program, adult liver transplant program and the current pediatric liver transplant venture was great for the positioning of our hospital in the city. As of today, we are known as a preeminent transplant centre and doing the highest number of liver transplant operations in India and the only transplant centre doing lung transplants in this part of the country since last December.”

He also mentions that they were the second hospital in Mumbai to add a pancreatic transplant team in their hospital. He concludes saying that the transplant program has lots of potentials and considers himself lucky to be part of its progress. Besides the transplant programs, when asked about his other ventures, the CEO had an effortless response,

“Apart from transplants, I think that one of the things I could successfully do over here is to establish a pre-eminence for the hospital as a centre known for critical care. The city hospital capacity is around 56 beds in the ICU and we could convert the beds and drive business out of it because we started getting preeminence in the city. There were a lot of good cases giving us recognition, and I had to ensure that these case stories were put out to position ourselves in the centre of referral for critical care and emergencies. We can help because now during corona virus pandemic times, we have one of the lowest mortality rates in the city,” he states confidently.

Giving credit to his critical care team,

he says that they were the only ones working in the hospital when the pandemic started. The critical care team stood by like a rock, he says, to ensure that they could come out on top with successful stories of patients coming out of the ICU and ventilator which he mentions, was a huge fear especially in the beginning of the lockdown.

“When you are put on the ventilator there is a huge chance that you will lose your life. We’ve had 16 mortalities so far out of 500 covid-19 patients who were put on the ventilators. But the fact that you could see that ventilated patients including elderly people who were getting out of the ventilator and going back home- now that was a sight you could see. That’s another thing I think has been great for me. I focused on critical care and it worked right in time during the pandemic. We were well prepared for it when it came.”

When asked what was the next specialty the hospital would concentrate on, his answer was neurology stating that a top neurologist, Dr. Shirish had joined their team last year before the start of the pandemic. Dr Shirish M Hastak is the President of the Indian Strokes Association and the Mumbai Stroke Society. Admitting that the neurology department is still in a nascent stage, the CEO states that there are a lot of interventions in their stroke work which has allowed them to recover patients who approached the hospital within the four-hour time frame and immediately undergone surgery.

Interestingly, the company’s growth plans within the next five to six years seem to be leaning towards oncology.

“The growth I perceive for the company is to get into oncology. That is the only specialty that is missing in our centre. We’ve come across all kinds of transplants including buccal transplants, the only thing which is missing is for oncology. We do surgical oncology and medical oncology but radiation is a missing piece and if you understand oncology well, then you would know that a patient gets an all-round treatment when he comes for oncology. But in the absence of radiation therapy in our hospital, we are not able to go fully strong in this department. Our location is just 800 meters away from Tata hospital. Being so close to a premier institute in the country and not being able to provide treatment

in this is something that I’ve always had a feeling to change and our board has decided to move on with this once everything settles down a bit during this pandemic. Our hospital has 16 floors out of which 13 are functional at present. We are hoping to fill up the floors with this venture to mix up medical, radiation and surgical oncology. This way we will have come across everything that is in the modern medical field as of today.”

The company seems keen on investing in oncology in the next two to three years and hopes to be full-fledged in it by then.

What sets us apart from the rest

Gleneagles Global Hospitals has always been a strong player in the healthcare industry. It is considered to be a premier institute in terms of its hospitality, clinical stewardship in its transplant operations, critical care and even in out of the common specialties such as nephrology, hepatology, etc. Dr. Vivek says that the hospital is quite known in its circles for its outstanding patient service.

“Our ratings on Google are at 4.6 today. Which is a clear indicator of standards in terms of our service. The focus has always been in providing the best of clinicians, the best of clinical care to the patients, along with the medical and nursing team. Whereas a backend team offers support for other operations such as housekeeping, patient care services team, etc. The aim is to provide service related choices to the patient and the attendant so that we can provide an overall holistic care experience.”

The company realized that most hospitals either concentrate on clinical or non-clinical care. There was always a huge lack of focus in the service-related sector. The CEO knew that they were already on par with the clinical standards of patient care due to their exceptional team of notable doctors. However, service quality was not well defined. And so, from a 4.1 rating on Google back in 2019, the hospital was able to push itself to 4.6. A remarkable advancement indeed!

“Google is a third-party rating system. At the time of discharge, our team feedback is good or bad we would be rated on a third-party platform. We have consistently moved up the ladder in the past one year. And today at 4.6, I would say if we compare with any other

GOOGLE IS A THIRD-PARTY RATING SYSTEM

hospital in Mumbai, we are one of the best. I constantly try to know where we stand in the market and when I see hospitals of this big size, we are one of those which have the highest rating for 4.6. It just proves that our operational team is doing well.”

The team concentrated on specific areas which were crucial to the patient such as the discharge process wherein the patient gets discharged as quickly as anticipated, once the doctor has given them the green signal.

“We do know that certain things are not in our hands especially with insurance and corporate patients where we wait for approval from third parties. Nowadays we have started setting the expectations quicker in advance. So we tell the patient about the status of their approval and how much time it usually takes to be discharged. So by this, we are at least able to manage the patient’s expectations. So the discharge process is a big thing that we have focused on to bring the time spent on it down as much as possible.”

Unlocking values with vendor relationships

Gleneagles Global Hospitals is a part of a larger group called Parkway Pantai, a fully owned subsidiary of IHH Healthcare. The hospital in Mumbai acts as a part of the larger group. Most of the vendor engagement is done at the corporate level according to Dr Vivek Talulikar.

“The corporate team handles the vendors from the backend and they do rate contracts, while we do the negotiations. And I would say our job at this level would be to maintain the relationship with the vendors as well as make sure timely payouts are done. There were times before the pandemic when we have had to do transplants at every time of the day and night. We were constantly connected with our vendors and suppliers for equipment and for even transporting organs at emergency times and very short notices. We have even harvested organs as far away as Sholapur and brought lungs to Mumbai and implanted it in a patient waiting for a transplant at our hospital. We have also implanted organs from Chennai and brought organs by flight to Mumbai and implanted it here. All this is only possible because of our relationship with vendors and their support. So a lot of our operations are based on direct relationships with them and a lot has to be done via the corporate team which manages the relationships and we as a team directly manage the direct personal relationship with our vendors.”

Admittedly, things have slowed down in the last two months due to a severe crunch of cash

flow resulting in vendor payments getting delayed. However, all of the vendors were personally informed about the shortage and payment plans and fortunately, most of them have supported them during these dire times.

“Thankfully almost everybody has supported us during this time. Even today most vendors will ask you to pay in cash before delivering the supply because the times are very tough today. All materials are hard to get, especially the high-end drugs related to corona virus. They are very less in quantity and hard to find but our vendors have been supplying it to our hospital on a phone call. The main aim is for the company not to collapse during these difficult times. As they say, the ship should reach the shore before collapsing.”

With that, he remarks that his job as a CEO is to ensure that the hospital continues and they sustain this pressure while ensuring that everybody stays on the ship without losing jobs.

Insight into their critical suppliers

Speaking of their key suppliers, there are at least 10 critical players who supply around 70% of their equipment on the purchase and supply aspect according to Dr Vivek.

There are also vendors on a contract basis for housekeeping, equipment assembly, security, laundry, etc., which is very important for the hospital to run smoothly without any hiccups. Relationships are maintained directly with these critical suppliers who also report to the Head of their respective department so that the workflow does not suffer at any cost.

The Standard of Quality

The corporate team at Gleneagles Global Hospitals handles most of their purchase and supply chain vendors considering rate and quality of the equipment, etc.

On the contractual side, they have a tender process system which mentions the requirements, eligibility, criteria and expectations from the company’s side to the vendors. All the bids pitched in by the vendors are reviewed by a tender committee team in the corporate team at Hyderabad where all the bids are channeled along with being presented to respective department leads. Global hospitals ensure that the process is ‘followed to a T’ in Dr Vivek’s words, to ensure that the best option and rates are applicable for the hospital.

Key Business Message

“We have reached a stage where the covid-19 pandemic has created a new normal for all of us. With changing times and a changing



environment, I think healthcare would undergo a dramatic change when the fear settles down. It would still say that there would be a general fear among people while entering a hospital. I can confidently say that as a hospital we have cleared the market in both covid and non-covid areas with very clear separate entries for both as well as staff up to that level. We do not mix anything. With the new normal being covid staying here for the next 6-12 months. It is not going to go away anytime soon. That said, the biggest challenge in healthcare would be to ensure to the public that they should not avoid hospitals for their healthcare needs just because of covid. I have seen patients in the last 2-3 weeks who were so late to come that they already lost precious time because of the fear of the pandemic. There are hospitals as of today besides our hospital which are functioning and also have very clear market between covid and non-covid patients. We ensure that the transmission of the disease does not happen.

As we are entering a new stage in the pandemic a lot of new processes are coming up because we as a hospital cannot afford to have everything piled up in a single place believing that patients can handle everything. I think going forward you will see a lot of collaboration between hospitals in the city, irrespective of which group or organization you belong to help each other to at least move forward and provide sufficient healthcare to the rest of the city. And Mumbai, we have seen it being a big hotspot in the country and so, we have collaborated with other hospitals in the last three months to ensure that patients are getting beds and the best of service. Going forward a lot of public and private partnerships would come forward to ensure that healthcare would be a big focus for everyone. The Covid pandemic has woken all of us."

• Monika More met with a local train accident (gap trap victim) at Ghatkopar, on January 11th 2014. There was complete amputation of both her hands at the level of the proximal forearms.

• She was taken to a local municipal hospital at Ghatkopar primarily and later shifted to KEM Hospital, Parel.
• Her hands could not be replanted due to delay in reaching the hospital. The amputation stumps were closed and partly skin-grafted.

• There was a widespread outrage in the media following the accident. Social activists protested against the wide gaps between the platforms and the train foot step.

• Monika was rehabilitated by providing her with prosthetic limbs from Ottobock company.

• She completed her college education with great difficulty and help from her family and friends.

• She soon realized that the artificial limbs were not of much use. They were actually more of a burden for her. It was not possible to perform any useful work or activity with the prosthesis.

• She would use the prosthesis only for social reasons. For performing any activity, she would have to remove the prosthesis and use her remaining amputation stumps.

• Monika and her parents consulted me in August 2017. I informed and counseled them about Hand Transplantation. She was an ideal candidate for the surgery. She and her family were willing for the surgery.

• They came back in a few months and got all the investigations and assessments done.

• She was registered with the ZTCC and was on the waiting list. Meanwhile the family was trying to gather funds for her surgery.

• Unfortunately, in January 2019, Monika's father expired. He had a prolonged kidney disorder which worsened suddenly.

• The family was still trying to gather funds for the surgery.

• Finally, on Thursday, 27th August 2020, there was an organ alert from Chennai. The donor blood group was O -ve. Monika's blood group was O +ve.

• The transplant coordinator from Global Hospital went to Chennai along with a blood sample of Monika.

• The cross-match was done and was found to be favorable. The hands were harvested and were carried immediately by a chartered flight from Chennai to Mumbai.

• In the meantime, Monika was admitted in the hospital and her blood tests were conducted.

• She was wheeled into the Operation theatre at 11.30 pm. General anesthesia along with bilateral supraclavicular blocks were administered.

• The surgery started at 1 am (on Friday, 28th August 2020). The surgery was completed at 5 pm. Total surgical time was 16 hours.

• The patient was stable throughout the surgery. She was shifted to the transplant ICU for post-operative care and monitoring.

• She was extubated on Saturday, 29th August 2020, at 2.30 pm.

• She has been stable in the post-op period. The vascularity of the transplanted hands is well maintained.

• Total 12 hand transplants have been done in India- Bilateral -11 and Unilateral-01. Among 11 bilateral 10 were successful and 01 failed. Amruta institute- 7, Pondicherry- 2, Chennai- 1, Pune- 1(fail).

• We are not only the first hospital in Mumbai but also the only private hospital in the country to have done a successful Bilateral Hand Transplant. This is the 10th bilateral hand transplant of the country and all the rest have been done in trust or government funded hospital / medical colleges.

The Executives India

The Executives India Magazine is a print and online publication, published quarterly catering to C-suite executive across the Asia.

We publish an inspiring pile of entrepreneurial piece and provides detailed analysis across Asia's diversified marketplace.

We are composed of a superb and professional editorial team that keeps our readers up to date with the latest development in the Asian market through our one on one interview with the executives, highlighting the current event, as well as featuring articles on leading entrepreneur.

For ad enquiries please reach out
www.executivesindia.com - sanjay@executivesindia.com

+91 837 430 5090.