

Indian American gives Mumbai's emergency medical care new push

Imagine a situation where an accident takes place and the victim is lying on the road, bleeding profusely. Instead of waiting for the police to take the injured person to hospital, losing in the process precious time, a number is dialled and an ambulance arrives, fully equipped to provide immediate medical and trauma care while taking the person to hospital.

This prompt trauma care service has been launched in [Mumbai](#) with 26 hospitals, including 10 private, teaming up to provide round-the-clock emergency medical services, with one common phone number linking them - 1298.

This is the result of the persistent efforts of well-known Indian American doctor Navin C. Shah, who is keen to see the US model of emergency and trauma services replicated across India.

The service is for any kind of emergency - seizures, bullet injuries, cardiac problems, burns, pregnancy-related.

'The first half an hour is precious for a trauma patient. You can lose precious lives if immediate medical attention is not given,' Shah told IANS during a visit here.

He met Maharashtra Chief Minister Ashok Chavan last week in Mumbai as well as the state health secretary to finetune the service, which was launched in November.

'Now there are 50 ambulances, all linked to various hospitals, on standby that will be sent whenever the common number - 1298 - is dialled. Depending on the emergency, whether a cardiac problem, a burns problem, a road accident, bullet injuries, and the severity of the case, the staff in the ambulance will decide on which hospital to send the patient to,' Shah said.

There were 140,560 accident victims, including railway accidents, in India in 2007, according to official records.

Shah, a noted urologist and co-founder and former president of the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPI), has enlisted support for the endeavour from the American College of Surgeons as well as the US Consul General in Mumbai. They are providing three scholarships to train three doctors of the city in US trauma centres.

Shah says that in India only an MBBS doctor can be on an ambulance to provide medical aid, unlike in the US where trained paramedics are sent. Maharashtra's chief minister and health secretary have agreed to introduce a bill in the state assembly in March to allow trained paramedics to be in the ambulance, said Shah, who is an advisor to Mumbai's Hinduja Hospital.

Besides this project, Shah is keen to have the Indian government introduce a specialty course in infectious diseases and training for doctors on the subject. According to Shah, India has 50 million people suffering from infectious diseases and 48 percent of deaths are due to it.

'Infectious diseases is a major health issue. The US has had specialty in infectious diseases (ID) for the past 30 years and there are around 5,600 ID specialists in the US,' he said.

Shah brought the US model to India two years ago and discussed the issue with the prime minister, the health minister and the health secretary. He had met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on the issue last year but was unable to meet him during his current visit due to the prime minister's ill health.

The proposal was approved in June 2008, after which the Medical Council of India (MCI) wrote to Shah. Under the programme, specialisation in ID will be introduced as a two-year post-graduate course.

'We are formulating the Indian curriculum, keeping in mind that India is a tropical country.' It is to be submitted in March and the course is set to begin in 2010, he said.

An Indian American doctor, Akshay Shah, an ID specialist from Detroit, is providing a fully paid scholarship for an Indian doctor to go to the US and study the model there.

Shah is also trying to persuade the Indian government to introduce accreditation of hospitals, like in the US, to make them accountable.

'It is to ensure quality control of hospitals. In the US, an inspection can be made any time without any notice. And if a hospital is found wanting in patient care, hygiene, equipment, etc, then its licence is cancelled. There is constant monitoring, which should be introduced in India too,' he said.

(Ranjana Narayan can be contacted at ranjana.n@ians.in)

Ranjana Narayan (© IANS / India eNews)