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The right medical fit

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A free-of-cost referral guide with a database of 700 doctors in three Indian cities proves a help for patients and their families



For the right advice: Attending to patients. Photo: V. Sudershan

Amit's three-and-a-half-month-old son Darsh had a congenital heart problem — a hole in his tiny heart. He was also suffering from Down syndrome. Amit wanted to get the best of treatment for his son but staying in Bordubi village in Assam's Tinsukia district, he did not know how to go about it: where and which hospital to go to, how to get the right doctor and treatment.

It was one of his relatives who informed him about an organisation, Hospital Guide Foundation (HGF), which provides information, advice and guidance free of charge to patients or their attendants to get to genuine doctors specialising in the specific medical field and even facilitates in getting appointments with the doctors.

Amit says with guidance from HGF, not only has his son been successfully operated upon but appointments with doctors, both at AIIMS, New Delhi, and Lok Nayak Hospital, Delhi, were also arranged. Thanks to the doctors' advice and tips on physiotherapy, Darsh's movements have improved and his neck has become stronger and stable. What is more, Darsh has even started making eye contact, which he did not do earlier.

Vandana from Guwahati had many issues in the family: alcoholism, her husband's skin problem and her daughter's tumour in the brain. "Also I could not share the problem of alcoholism with anyone outside the family fearing ridicule in my conservative Marwari community," she says.

It was through HGF that she came to know that counselling also helps in getting over the problem of alcoholism. She did not even know that there was a counsellor in Guwahati. Vandana says but for the HGF's guidance she would have ended up spending four times the money than what she actually spent in terms of travelling, getting appointments with doctors and treatment of her husband and her daughter.

It is not only patients or their family members in far-flung States and remote areas, even those living in metropolitan cities sometimes do not know doctors who specialise in a particular ailment and want to be sure that they do not end up being fleeced by doctors who may have commercial interest.

Sanjay Gupta, who lives in Delhi, says he was suffering from sarcoidosis — a chronic lung disease — and was being treated by doctors at government hospitals but somehow he was not sure whether the medicines prescribed were actually working. It was with the help of HGF that he got an appointment with a specialist within a week; the doctor went through Mr. Gupta's medical documents and explained to him the line of treatment he was getting. This gave Mr. Gupta confidence.

How does one approach HGF? The patient or their attendant has to fill a simple "send a query" form on the website www.hospitalguide.in. The query is responded to within 72 hours provided the patient promptly provides all the details. It is only after thorough evaluation of the case that suggestions and contacts are provided.

Indiritta Singh D'mello, HGF's founder, says the process also involves deciphering the specialty the patient needs to be referred to and once this is done, the patient stands a better chance for correct initial diagnosis.

According to Ms. D'mello, "There are many doctors that are helping this social cause purely on goodwill. Doctors are enlisted on the database of HGF only after doing a thorough reference check."

Started over two years back, HGF today has more than 700 doctors on its database and are serving in Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore. The organisation also has a citizen journal's forum with 50,000 members and many prominent doctors. The platform is to share experiences and articles, have discussions on healthcare issues and raise awareness

amongst people. Members can seek opinions, suggestions on doctors/healthcare providers on this forum. According to Dr. Ambrish Mithal, since there is no commercial angle and no advertising by doctors or hospitals, the choices recommended are based on suggestions by doctors of repute, tempered by personal experience of the patient.

Ms. D'mello says the service provided is absolutely free with no commercial transaction with suggested healthcare providers or doctors and this ensures unbiased suggestions without any ulterior motive.

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