

Case study: A Heart ‘Patient’

I am Mr. Gulati. I am 58-year-old and live in West Delhi with my wife and our son. My daughter is already married. I used to work in Indian Railways as a manager and took voluntary retirement recently. We lived in a rented accommodation for twenty years. Had faced several problems like not having bought your own house, bringing up children and financial stress.

I used to be fit and fine. Never had any problem of sugar (diabetes), Blood Pressure or anything. Frankly, I had never heard about these diseases. I think these diseases are becoming common since the last ten years or so. Well, occasionally I used to feel breathless while walking and had mild anxiety. Whenever I developed these symptoms, I used to take rest and become alright.

This was around 3 years back. One night I felt very uneasy. I sweated and felt anxious (*ghabarahat ho rahi thi*). We then visited a nearby private clinic. The doctor gave me some medicines. But I did not feel better. We consulted our relatives and they suggested that I should see this doctor who is a reputed cardiologist in West Delhi. He did give me some medicines but referred me to a bigger hospital. That night I felt very uneasy and could not sleep the whole night. I was then taken to hospital X. They made me undergo several tests including, I think, angiography. They charged Rs 15,000 for the tests and medicines. Now when I think of that, I feel all the medicines were overcharged and over prescribed. There is some kind of network between the chemist shop and the hospital management in this hospital, I think the chemist is a relative of some of the management staff. Though initially I felt better, from the next day onwards, my condition started deteriorating rapidly. All this while the Junior resident doctor was treating me. My relatives pleaded and requested for a visit by the senior doctor (cardiologist). He got some more tests done and suggested that I undergo bypass surgery as I have major blockages in my arteries.

Somehow, we could not trust this hospital any more. My family members decided to move me out of this hospital. In fact this is a hospital ‘that kills people’. We could never advise anyone to go to that hospital. So many young patients were dying in front of my own eyes. That is why we felt

anxious to leave the hospital as soon as possible. My brother-in-law (a rich businessman) decided that I move in to the best hospital. When we were leaving, the hospital guard also assured us that we did the right thing by leaving this hospital. 'He told us, now that you are taking him out of this hospital, he will recover'. After I left, many others followed us and left the hospital.

The moment I reached the other hospital which is so well reputed for heart treatment, I began to feel better. I was immediately operated. This was an open heart surgery. The operation was successful. It costs us a huge amount, how much was it? (he asked his wife). It was Rs. 2, 78,0000. The initial package was only 1.5 lakhs and then it became so much. I was given good food, plenty of green vegetables, soup. I could not eat that much. After eight days I was discharged. This hospital is good but of course the doctors charge a lot of money. After everything was done, they did another X-ray. I was relieved. The x-ray was basically for the purpose of making money. It was not really needed. I came back home. I was asked to eat properly with plenty of green vegetables, walk regularly and lead a healthy lifestyle.

I went to the same hospital for a check-up after a year. Everything was normal. They asked me to come for a follow up regularly either there or any nearby clinic. I am kind of fine. So I don't go. I do the follow up in the Railway hospital. In fact sometimes I regret that I did not think of the possibility of getting operated in this hospital. When I showed them the report, the doctors said they could have done the operation here too. I get my B.P, Sugar check-ups done regularly. I am told that these are silent diseases. I used to go for a walk. Since the last one year, I am completely fine. No medicines, no exercise, no restrictions on diet!.

I don't think heredity plays any role in heart disease. It is essentially stress. Everybody has stress. Look at the people with millions of money but they also have stress. One never knows how one gets these diseases. Well, to some extent diet has a role to play. If you don't eat properly, how would the veins run? We get to read that if you follow a healthy diet and exercise regularly, you will not have diabetes, high B.P or heart diseases. But how long can one have healthy diet? What should one eat in healthy diet? Low, sugar, low salt, low fat..... the list goes on. Look at the prices of vegetables and fruits? Do you think it is practical to have five servings of food every day? Even when one pays for the vegetables, what is the guarantee of the quality of these vegetables? So

much of pesticide! Adulteration! Then people say that we should have organic food. That is really for the upper class! We are middle class people – can't afford brown rice and organic stuff. I have decided to eat everything, mostly home-made food. I think home-made food is the best and healthy.

But all said and done, one does not know when one would get these diseases. Our neighbour the other day, suddenly collapsed to death. He had no risk factors, He was leading kind of contented life – he had got his children married off, was living in his own house which he has bought recently. He was sitting in the balcony and asked his wife to get a cup of tea. By the time she returned with the tea, he was no more. He had a heart failure. It is so sad! He could not even mention what was happening to him. Forget about him, here is this young man, a distant relative of ours has also developed heart problem, at such a young age! These diseases are catching everyone at such a young age. His wife added – the young man, I think was diabetic? Our neighbours said that he also used to smoke!! Not sure

Questions

- 1. What are the 'causes' of Non-communicable Diseases (heart disease/diabetes)?**
- 2. Why non-communicable diseases called 'lifestyle' diseases?**
- 3. Who is responsible for leading a healthy lifestyle?**
- 4. What are the constraints in accessing NCD care?**