



Surgery gives 5-month-old gift of hearing

On the 10th of December 2019, a five-month-old baby boy weighing only 4.3 kg underwent cochlear implant surgery at CMC, becoming the youngest recipient of a cochlear implant in India

The birth of a child is a joyous occasion, a memorable day when parents make wishes and are full of hope for the future of their child. They hope that their child will grow up healthy and imagine feeling proud as they see their children attain various milestones.

Lokesh* was born at CMC Vellore in June 2019. He was born prematurely in the seventh month of pregnancy. Soon after birth, various complications set in - hyaline membrane disease, a respiratory disease that newborns, especially premature newborns, are vulnerable to, as well as neonatal sepsis (infection of the blood) and meningitis (infection of the brain lining). Many teams in CMC working together managed to restore Lokesh to normalcy.

But further trials awaited the parents. The ENT department's routine hearing screening for all babies born at CMC showed that Lokesh had developed hearing loss, probably as a result of the meningitis. Further testing by Unit 4 of the department confirmed profound hearing loss in both ears.



Children who have received cochlear implants, playing in the therapy room at CMC



This type of hearing loss before starting to speak is known as prelingual deafness and would lead to speech problems if not addressed in the early years of life. For Lokesh, it was crucial to have corrective surgery as early as possible as there was the danger of the meningitis infection causing obstruction of the 'inner ear', the innermost part of the ear.

After frequent visits to the outpatient department for investigations, the anxious parents were told of the plan for cochlear implantation - the surgical implantation of a device that enables hearing. Following this, various meetings were held to discuss the case with other teams. The results of Lokesh's MRI and CT scans to assess the problem were discussed with radiologists. Following this, the paediatricians and anaesthetists were consulted and the surgery finalised. A paediatric ICU bed was also reserved for his care, after surgery.

Cochlear implant surgery is an expensive operation. This dooms many children and adults who cannot afford the surgery to permanent deafness. In Lokesh's case however, the money for the surgery was sanctioned through the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme (TNCMCHIS).



The TNCMCHIS medical officers assessed Lokesh and immediately sanctioned the finances necessary for his surgery. With this hurdle out of the way, Lokesh underwent cochlear implant surgery under the care of experienced surgeons and anaesthetists becoming CMC's as well as the nation's youngest recipient of a cochlear implant.

Despite the various risks, Lokesh's surgery was successful. The smiles on the faces of his family members that greeted the large team who attended to the precious baby were full of gratitude for CMC. The family assured us that they would work hard toward his speedy recovery. We pray that Lokesh would grow up to be an independent, healthy person capable of contributing significantly to society.

* name changed

Story and picture credit: ENT Unit 4