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Oxygen Therapy hits town; is seen to be a miracle cure

A Puff Of O₂ A Day Keeps The Doctor Away

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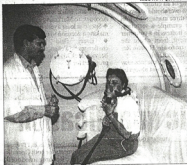
DON'T be surprised if your doctor prescribes a few doses of oxygen when you go to him with a cut that's taking longer than usual to heal. No, he doesn't want you to take a run around the block in the fresh morning air, or go to the newest oxygen bar in town to give your spirit and social life a lift. What he may be referring to is Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy, which involves giving a patient oxygen under high pressure, the miracle cure that is helping people with problems as diverse as cancer, injuries and acute hearing loss.

And gunshot wounds, as in the case of Surendra Singh Yadav, a 23-year-old cop from Imphal. Yadav had been told he'd

have to get his leg amputated after a gunshot punctured the main artery of his right leg during an anti-insurgency mission. "Even after vascular surgery repairs the damage to the blood vessels, it takes weeks for them to deliver blood back to the limb, making it very difficult to salvage the limb," says Dr Taren Sahni, Senior Consultant, Hyperbaric Medicine, Apollo Hospital.

Yadav was advised hyperbaric oxygen therapy in Delhi. "Under pressure, oxygen dissolves in the plasma and percolates into the tissue fluids, thus accelerating recovery by reaching areas where even blood cannot reach," says Sahni. It worked for Yadav, who was back on his feet in no time. "When we last heard, he was running after terrorists again and they were still

MUSTAFA QURAISHI



Oxygen Therapy at Apollo

out for his blood," says Sahni.

But hyperbaric medicine does more than treat gunshot wounds. The therapy is used on slow-healing wounds common in diabetics, skin grafts, burns, sudden deafness, decompression sickness, high blood loss, and intracranial abscesses where surgery is not possible. It also prevents gangrene and decreases radiation tissue damage from radiotherapy.

As it did in the case of Ms Jagpal Kaur, 45, who developed a deep ulcer in her breast being treated for breast cancer. Two and a half years and half-a-dozen doctors later, she was told to undergo hyperbaric treatment. "After just sixteen sessions, my radiation-induced ulcer has healed 80 per cent and now I can get on with my life,"

she says.

Now the therapy is being used to treat children with cerebral palsy to try and reverse the damage. "Studies in the West have shown that hyperbaric therapy reverses brain damage in cases of cerebral palsy, so we are conducting a small study at Apollo to gauge whether it actually works," says Sahni. Six children under 5 years will undergo 40 sessions each and their condition and progress will be monitored over the period. "After 11 sessions, the children have reported different degrees of progress but we'll get the complete picture only after all the sessions are over," says Sahni.

If it works, the Rs 1,500 to Rs 2,800 per session would be a small price to pay for alleviating symptoms of cerebral palsy.