

Pune doctors confirm 12 have lost eyesight

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PUNE, JANUARY 10: Confirming the worst fears, doctors at Pune's Sassoon Hospital on Monday said that 12 of the 20 infected eye patients who were shifted from the Sangli Civil Hospital had lost vision in the eyes operated upon after the Sangli camp.

Sassoon doctors were now battling to stop the infection from spreading to other parts of the body since it could endanger their lives. The condition of one of the patients was said to be critical.

State Health Minister Digvijay Khanvilkar cut short his visit to Beed and rushed to Pune this evening. He later told mediapersons at the Sassoon Hospital that the officials concerned would be instructed to permit post-eye camp surgeries "only in hospitals under a controlled situation."

But worried Sassoon doctors had other things on mind today. Six of the 12 who were shifted from Sangli were operated upon to prevent the infection from spreading. "Their lives are now more important than their eyes," Director, Health Services Dr C K Balpande said.

Khanvilkar met the patients and discussed the situation with senior doctors attending on them. Assuring the kith and kin of the victims of every possible care and treatment, the minister also announced immediate financial assistance of Rs 25,000 to each victim of vision-loss.

The condition of the eldest of the victims brought to the Sassoon Hospital, 70-year old Anna Jadhav, was stated to be critical. He was shifted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) after he developed complications while on the operation table.

The infection was suspected to have affected Jadhav's movements. "The CT scan reports confirm that he is out danger. He will remain under observation for some more time," Director, Medical Education Dr Mrudula Phadke, Dean of the Sassoon Hospital till a couple of days ago, informed the minister. The remaining six patients would be operated upon on Tuesday, Phadke said.

Acting Dean of the Sassoon Hospital Dr P M Bulakh identified the six who were operated upon today as Bhau Dongre (60), Bhimrao Gaikwad (60), Kundabi Pathan (60), Gaurabai Patil and Jadhav. "They are all under keen observation," he said.

Help had been sought from senior ophthalmologists Dr Shreekant Kelkar and Dr Salil Gadkari, the minister was told.

A team of experts from Pune would be leaving for Sangli on Tuesday to inspect the situation at the Civil Hospital there. "It would decide whether the remaining patients need to be shifted to Pune," Khanvilkar said.

Describing the incident as "unfortunate", Khanvilkar maintained that the health department officials and doctors were doing their best. "The patients are being given the best of treatment," he said.

On fixing responsibility, Khanvilkar said that nothing could be said about it until reports from the inquiry committees were received. These panels, he said, were going into the details of various aspects of the incident. "The IV fluids and other medicines which were used during the operations in Sangli have already been withdrawn from circulation. We are awaiting the reports. But you must take into account the fact that only 20 persons have complained whereas the number of operations was higher," he reiterated, adding that the Chief Minister was being apprised of the situation.

Khanvilkar said he would again visit the Sassoon Hospital on Tuesday before leaving for Mumbai to attend the weekly Cabinet meeting. Health department officials have already been told to be cautious about the post-eye camp surgeries, the minister said, adding that no such surgery would be permitted under make-shift arrangements during eye camps.

On his part, Khanvilkar said that the Sangli Civil Hospital had shown the best results for three consecutive years insofar as the intra-ocular lens transplant (IOL) surgeries were concerned.

Earlier in the morning, Sangli Civil Surgeon Sudhir Deshmukh admitted that the Sangli Civil Hospital faced an acute shortage of sophisticated equipment required to treat such severe eye infections.

He admitted that the Civil Hospital had to borrow microscopes from private practitioners to carry out various tests. He also confessed that the infection could not be treated due to the lack of the special instrument which is used to probe and treat infections.

"These instruments are disposable and each of them costs about Rs 6,500. In fact, today we sent our order for the instruments by fax to the manufacturers at Ahmedabad," he said.

Deshmukh said the lack of equipment had forced the civil hospital authorities to send 12 patients to Sassoon hospital in Pune.

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