

Iraqi children treated in Delhi

New Delhi: Hussain Firas, a resident of Baghdad in Iraq, is just 18 months old. He was born with symptoms of being a "blue baby" due to a congenital heart problem. He is now ready to return home with his lips and nails appearing pink.

Ebrahim is three years old. He cannot communicate with his doctors and well wishers since he can just mutter a few words in Arabic.

His growth was impaired by an ailing heart, which has since been operated upon successfully.

In his own way he expresses his joy at his recovery by waving his hands at everyone who visits him.

They are among the 80 children from war-ravaged Iraq presently getting treatment at the elite private Indraprastha Apollo Hospital of New Delhi.

They were sent there by the Iraqi authorities. Most of them are either suffering from heart diseases or hearing problems.

"It is difficult to say whether they are victims of the war as we have not established the correlation between their ailments and the prevailing turmoil in Iraq," says Dr Anupam Sibal, director of medical services at the hospital.

Implants

Dr Amit Kishore, senior consultant of ENT, however, has a different view on this. "It is possible that they lost their hearing due to sounds of blasts while they may still have been in the wombs of their mothers," he says.

His team of ENT experts have conducted operations of 18 children, who have been given Cochlear implants and another batch of six kids are ready for the surgery. Some of these children were present along with their parents at a press conference the Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals organised.

The parents, however, avoided interacting with the media.

Their interpreters explained that they would rather prefer to remain anonymous since they have to return home and some sections out there may take offence if they end up discussing the situation in their home land.

According to Richard Larison, managing director of the hospital, the first batch of six Iraqi children with hearing impairment arrived in India on June 1.

They were followed by three more batches. Of the 80 children, 10 have come with serious congenital heart ailments, Larison added.

The hospital authorities have no idea why their hospital was chosen by the Iraqi government, which is footing the bill for all the treatments. They, however, admit foreigners prefer their hospital due to its ability to deliver cutting edge medical services at a fraction of the cost compared with the West.

"Apollo Hospitals has a long history of treating patients from overseas, particularly patients from the Middle East. We have witnessed an increase in the number of patients from overseas. At any given time, 10 per cent of the inpatient beds are occupied by persons from overseas," Larison said.

According to him, the hospital has arrangements for translators and is making it sure that like most of their overseas patients, the Iraqi children and their families get their local cuisine.