

Apollo brings hope in an oxygen chamber

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Deep-sea divers are quite prone to decompression, an illness best treated by exposing divers to 100 per cent oxygen at a pressure greater than the atmospheric in a special treatment chamber called the Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT) which has been practised worldwide for nearly four decades.

Clinical experiences have shown that the treatment also brings improvements in cases of various other ailments. "Proper functioning of body tissues depends upon continuous and adequate oxygen supply to them. In certain ailments which affect the normal oxygen supply, the patient is given HBO therapy where he is exposed to 100 per cent oxygen at a pressure twice or even three times that of atmospheric pressure and oxygen in solution in the blood increases to over 10 times," explains Dr Tarun Sahni of Indraprastha Apollo Hospital.

This therapy helps patients whose recovery is impaired due to poor supply of oxygen. "The therapy has proved vital in curing various diseases like gas gangrene, crush injuries, severe burns, acute traumatic wounds and to those suffering from non-healing ulcers due to diabetes or radiation. It is the first line of treatment for those suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning due to exposure to smoke and to prevent permanent delayed neurological complications. It expedites healing of the bone when combined with conventional treatment and also benefits sudden deafness," says Dr Alok Aggarwal.

This therapy has gained considerable recognition in the last decade, and is quite popular in hospitals in the west. "In India too, the Navy Hospital in Mumbai and the Air Force Hospital of Bangalore have Hyperbaric Oxygen chambers, but the treatment is only available to Defence personnel and their relations," avers Dr Sahni.

Indraprastha Apollo Hospital is the first private hospital in north India, "perhaps first in entire Asia," to have this facility. Dr Sahni, is a veteran in this field and therefore has been entrusted with the responsibility of this chamber. With an experience spanning over two decades he has served the Indian Navy and later also worked in the Middle East, and in UK.

"The treatment chamber which can accommodate four to five patients at a time has been manufactured indigenously by a Pune based firm, but the machinery has been imported from the USA. The unit has been set up according to stringent American safety guidelines," said Dr Sahni.

The patient, who remains for about one hour inside the chamber, is made to wear a specially treated mask and is monitored by a nurse inside the chamber. A technician remains in constant touch with the nurse through a transmitter and watches every move in a video camera and



Breathing his way to life

adjusts oxygen pressure and chamber temperature accordingly. "Since the patient need

not be hospitalised, the cost of the treatment is reduced drastically, and the number of sit-

tings depend on the severity of the disease," says Dr Aggarwal.