

DECCAN HERALD

For special children
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The rejection or even the abandonment of people with special needs is a common scenario, even so for those with illnesses pertaining to the brain. Reports of people suffering from such illnesses being subjected to inhuman treatment do not limit themselves to the uneducated or uncivilized societies. The stigma attached is rampant.

But Parijma Neuro Diagnostic and Rehabilitation Centre (PNRC) has a different approach to this issue. Located in Wilson Garden, PNRC is catering to patients with neurological problems like epilepsy with fits, neuromuscular problems, delayed mental development, specific learning disability, mental retardation, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), autism and children with brain damage.

Dr Suresh Rao Aroor, who quit his job in the Department of Paediatric Neurology at NIMHANS to work for PNRC says, "We offer a comprehensive neuro-diagnostic and rehabilitation service with the help of state-of-the-art equipment, manned by experienced and skilled specialists and well trained support staff." PNRC consists of various departments like Psychology, Physical Therapy, Early Intervention and Electro-physiology.

A multi-disciplinary team consisting of a neurologist, clinical psychologist, physiotherapist and social worker conducts the neuro-psychological evaluation, including intellectual assessment, specific learning disability and behaviour screening. The patients then undergo therapy which consists of medicines, behaviour modification, cognitive training with psychological remedial programmes and parental counselling.

Surprisingly, children constitute a large number of the patients. While the most common illness is epilepsy with the high incidence rate of 2 per cent, neuromuscular disorders are heterogenous and the most common among these is cerebral palsy (0.25 per cent). Epilepsy starts in childhood as a result of which it occurs mostly in children.

Parijma Learning Centre/school for slow learners (PLC) was started in 1999 as a pilot project for children who are slow learners. It has been estimated that about 10 per cent of school children have a lower than average learning ability due to various reasons.

The school has two sections- the pre-school and the regular school. The pre-school is for children in the age group of three to seven who have suffered a brain damage and have not recovered optimally enough to go to nursery school. One teacher is in charge of four children.

On the other hand, regular or the slow learners' school is for those children who have attended normal school but dropped out due to their inability to cope with the curriculum.

The school follows the National Open School- Foundation and Secondary Courses (English Medium) syllabus which is equivalent to the SSLC/CBSE/ICSE. The students are trained in one subject at a time. The school extends to the twelfth standard. Says Dr Suresh, "It may take nearly two to three years to get through tenth standard alone but in the end they make it."

Though PLC started on an experimental basis it has proved to be a great success, with all the children showing considerable academic progress, some of them even joining main-stream education after a year or two of intensive training.

PNRC also boasts of a trust 'Ashwasan', a self-help group for children with neurological problems where treatment is provided at subsidised rates.

Parijma has now acquired land to realise the long cherished dream of providing specialized treatment free of cost and hopes to implement this plan within the next two years.