

Home dialysis sessions double in city amid pandemic

Malathy Iyer & Mayur Shetty | TNN

Mumbai: Amidst the pandemic, there's been an increase in the number of kidney-failure patients undergoing dialysis at home though the procedure costs twice as much as it does in a hospital.

Monthly hemodialysis sessions done by Apex Kidney Foundation, one of the few companies that offer home hemodialysis, has doubled in these Covid-19 months from 250-odd to 500-plus, said its technical services head Sudhir Bavarao.

According to nephrologist Dr Jatni Kothari said, "Home dialysis is a matter of survival for some patients who cannot travel to hospitals or dialysis centres due to underlying health conditions and the increased risk of Covid."

Hemodialysis (removing waste products from the blood) is required 3-4 times a week. In a hospital, it costs about Rs 2,000 per session or up to Rs 25,000 a month; home sessions would cost up to Rs 50,000 a month as they entail renting a

PATIENTS DROP HOSPITAL VISITS

For kidney failure patients who can afford it, getting dialysis done at home is a convenient option. For others, medical insurance makes it easier



HEMODIALYSIS

- > Required 3-4 times a week
- > Costs on an average ₹2,000 per session in hosps, almost double that at home

PERITONEAL DIALYSIS

- > Patient can do it without going to a centre
- > Procedure costs ₹25,000 for the entire month

machine, fixing a special water filter, buying single-use consumables and injections as well as getting a dialysis technician to visit three times a week.

Takers for the other home dialysis option—peritoneal dialysis that does not need a machine—has also increased.

►Saves on time, P 2

Home dialysis saves time, is 'less depressing', say most patients

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Dr Umesh Khanna of NGO Mumbai Kidney Foundation said there has been a 10% increase in peritoneal dialysis patients in the last few months compared to previous years. Peritoneal dialysis can be done without technicians and costs about Rs 25,000 a month.

A senior nephrologist said home dialysis is usually an option for the rich and affording class, but for many urban patients, medical insurance has brought it within reach. Rashmi Nandargi, head—retail health underwriting, Bajaj Allianz General Insurance, said, "Our hospitalisation health insurance policies cover dialysis. We do pay for home dialysis as well." However, home dialysis depends on the doctor's advice and the patient's physical stability as some may have other complications that require hospitalization, she added.

When Covid-19 hit Mumbai in March, kidney-failure patients were among the worst-hit.

TYPES OF DIALYSIS

HEMODIALYSIS

- Hemodialysis is needed 3-4 times a week
- Hemodialysis requires an access portal (to connect to an artery or a vein) created by a surgeon
- In dialysis, a machine and a special filter wash away waste products from blood and return blood to the body
- It takes roughly 3.5 hours



PERITONEAL

- Peritoneal dialysis is a daily procedure to collect waste from blood by washing empty space in abdomen (peritoneal cavity). Can be one from home
- A surgeon places an access into the lining of the abdominal wall
- Its USP is the patient can do the process without going to a centre

They had to step out for dialysis thrice a week, facing an increased risk of contracting Covid-19, and, worse, a higher risk of mortality. The home option—which the US health insurance authority has made mandatory for a section of pa-

tients from January 1—thus seemed safer.

A 42-year-old businessman from Borivli, Ketan Parikh, opted for home dialysis because of the convenience of not having to travel to a hospital in Mumbai's terrible traffic. For

others, it meant reducing the risk associated with crowded trains and hospital corridors.

"When a patient goes to a hospital for dialysis, his/her companion is also exposed to a higher risk of Covid-19," said nephrologist Dr Jatin Kothari, who consults at Hinduja Hospital, Mahim, and is a trustee with Apex Foundation.

Dr Hemal Shah from H N Reliance Hospital said five of his patients opted for home hemodialysis sessions in recent months as they found it to be safer and comfortable. Altamount Road resident Atul Mehta (name changed) said the home option is less depressing and "one can watch TV in home clothes" while undergoing the procedure.

In Mumbai, patients save time as well. "Dialysis takes about three and half hours, but the technician needs 30 minutes before and after the procedure. Also, in Mumbai, one has to travel for a minimum of an hour each way. So, a patient loses a minimum of seven hours due to dialysis," said Kothari.