

In a “Marathon Surgery” Doctors in Kerala Perform India's First Shoulder-Level Full-Arm Transplant

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Doctors at Amrita Hospital, Kochi performed nation's first shoulder-level full-arm transplant and third in the world after Mexico and France.

Amaresh, an employee of Karnataka's Gulbarga Electricity Supply Company, lost his hands in electrocution at work in 2017. His left hand was amputated at shoulder level while right hand at the elbow level. In September 2018, he was enrolled as a recipient awaiting transplantation in the Kerala Network for Organ Sharing (KNOS) with the help of Amrita Hospital.

Amaresh's long wait came to an end in January 2022 when Vinod's family agreed for donation of his hand along with other organs. Vinod (age 54, native of Kollam, Kerala) was declared brain dead at Government Medical College in Thiruvananthapuram after he sustained severe head injury in a deadly road accident.

On getting consent from Vinod's family, and hands retrieval, a team of doctors led by Drs. Subramania Iyer and Mohit Sharma from the Centre for Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at Amrita

Hospital performed the challenging 18-hour shoulder level transplant surgery on Amaresh which required a team of 20 surgeons, 10 anaesthetists, and 5 practice sessions.

Dr. Iyer explained that hand transplants become challenging when the level of amputation is higher, hence shoulder-level full-arm transplants are difficult. To start with, the retrieval of hands at shoulder level itself is a complex procedure involving muscles of chest, neck and upper limbs; major arteries, veins and nerves and with no training available, team had to self-train and perform practice sessions on cadavers.

After a successful hand transplant, Amaresh is now on the road to recovery with regular physiotherapy sessions.

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To cite : Suriyamoorthi S, Shroff S. In the news. In a “Marathon Surgery” Doctors in Kerala Perform India's First Shoulder-Level Full-Arm Transplant. Indian Transplant Newsletter. 2022 Jul - Oct; 21(Cumulative issue 66):p3.

