

## Recipient Story

### The Second Inning

**Rajesh Khanna**

Gurugram-based organ recipient, who holds a senior leadership position in an international travel firm



Rajesh Khanna (Lung transplant recipient) walking the ramp

I am sitting in Magnolia Bakery, my favourite café in the tony Jubilee Hills of Hyderabad. I am sipping coffee (nearly after one year) and digging into a slice of rich Belgium chocolate cake with due permission from my dietician. This moment of bliss is one of my happiest indulgences and I do not take it for granted. I have learnt to be mindful and thankful.

When I introspect and look back it's hard to forget the odds of battling a progressive ailment; tied to an oxygen concentrator like a helpless prisoner. In a flash of a second, it all seemed like a bad dream. Thank God, for that's in the past now.

Late last June, I had to be dashed off in a train ambulance to Hyderabad from my home in Gurugram. I could not even take a flight for fear that the altitude would choke me. A prolonged Interstitial Lung Disease (ILD) compounded by a severe post-COVID complication got me to the end-stage of the ailment. I had COVID in 2020 and my dependence on oxygen shot up from a few hours in a day to 24x7. Nearly all the doctors I had consulted in Delhi and Gurugram had hinted that lung transplant would be the way forward, given the progressive nature of the ailment. I wasn't even keen on considering a transplant, believing somehow and secretly, that I would be better if not cured.

There was also an element of fear and I had psyched myself up completely after reading about it on the Internet. Its intensely invasive nature as I understood it, was dreadful and I wanted to avoid it. I wanted to let the disease take its own course, which in other words meant, dying a little each day.

One day I took stock of my life. I looked at my young son, my wife and my septuagenarian parents and I found my answers. I told myself that I have to be around for them. They need me. I would fight for them, I vowed.

I gathered myself mentally; picked myself up and made the best decision of my life and decided to go for a double lung transplant and surrendered all my fears and fate to the Almighty.



In Gurugram, I live in close proximity with some of the best super speciality hospitals. But none had the facility of lung transplant. I had no option but to relocate as it was a long-drawn treatment process.

Our choice of Hyderabad was an outcome of a collective diligent research. We rested our case and trust at the Krishna Institute of Medical Science (KIMS). The train ride to Hyderabad in that makeshift ambulance was long and I was anxious. Finally, in the new surroundings and set-up where my parents and wife hid their silent tears; put on their bravest fronts to make it as seamlessly normal, comfortable, warm and cosy as home, I waited patiently for my turn to come.

I was called one early morning in August 2022 saying an organ donor was found. The siren-blazing ambulance took us through a busy traffic, oxygen pipe in my nose and fear in my heart. My wife's prayer, holding my hand all through the way, comforted me all over again. I was calm. All that I recalled was being wheeled inside the operation theatre and waking up in an unfamiliar ICU room. Multiple pipes inserted into my neck, nose and body and deafening beeps of machines, I felt unreal. I made it!

I had never lost hope as there were people who took it upon themselves to cheer me. Like Dr Sandeep Attawar, Chair & Director of Thoracic Organ Transplants at KIMS. His cheerful face and encouraging words always lifted my spirits. And Dr Vijil Rahulan, Chief Transplant Pulmonologist at KIMS, whose preciseness combined with compassion, was always so reassuring.

I was finally discharged after weeks and gained new strength each day with physio and of course regimented diet. One day, I began to breathe on my own without any support. Tears welled up my eyes. My family rushed to see the miracle. We huddled and cried together. Just one more time!

Normalcy kicked in slow and steadily. One of my first public outings was to take part in the "Ramp Walk for a Cause" organised by MOHAN Foundation where I walked the ramp in support of organ donation.

Occasionally, I sit back and reflect upon my life. Often, my thoughts race to that unknown and faceless donor and the family because of whom I have a second life. Would they ever know the joy they brought to me and my family? Would they ever know that it meant the world to me? I gaze upon the stars on so many dark and gloomy nights and thank God for my life. May the donor's family be blessed in all forms possible on earth.

I sip my coffee once again lounging in my favourite café, I truly thank my stars!

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