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Northumbria academic helps establish major transplant programme in India

A Northumbria University academic is playing the lead role in bringing heart and lung transplants to state-run hospitals across India.

Stephen Clark, Professor of Cardiothoracic Surgery and Cardiopulmonary Transplantation in Northumbria's Department of Applied Sciences, is helping the Sanjay Gandhi Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences (SGPGIMS), in Nawab, to establish its first heart and lung transplantation programme.

Until now, only a few heart transplants have ever taken place in India, and

these have taken place in private hospitals because of previous complex licensing issues. Anyone requiring such life-saving surgery would have to travel long distances and pay prohibitively high costs.

Professor Clark, a former Director of Cardiopulmonary Transplantation at Newcastle's Freeman Hospital, is mentoring SGPGIMS surgeons through their first operations. He will also help to establish more transplantation units across India and provide distant support to medical staff once they are up and running.

Professor Clark said: "I have been doing heart and lung transplants for around 17 years at the Freeman Hospital and am widely involved nationally and internationally, with doing this kind of knowledge and skill-sharing work and helping to establish or assist other transplant units for a number of years now.

"I have helped heart and lung transplant units in Egypt, Turkey and Sri Lanka, but the project in India is the biggest undertaking, because of the size of the country and the number of units that want to start doing heart transplants.

"The country has a rising population with serious conditions such as heart failure, high blood pressure and diabetes, so there is a huge need for heart and lung transplantation to become more widely available."

SGPGIMS is a 1,000-bed hospital catering for a huge population of 200 million, in one of the largest states in India. It has established itself as a premier institute for teaching, training and research in just 25 years. The hospital is now fully equipped and capable of starting a heart and lung transplant unit with its license and all logistical support provided by the hospital and the Indian Government.

Dr Gauranga Majumdar, Professor in Cardio-Thoracic and Vascular Surgery at SGPGIMS, attended the annually held International Heart and Lung Transplant Course, led by Professor Clark, at Newcastle's Freeman Hospital last year to gain initial experience, skills and knowledge prior to Professor Clark's visit to his institution in India.

He said: "I myself along with fellow colleagues Professor Surendra Agarwal and Dr Bipin Chandra have benefitted tremendously from the course at

Newcastle's Surgical Training Centre. We want to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Professor Clark for all the help he has provided in visiting, guiding and mentoring our heart and lung transplantation unit. We look forward to a long-term collaboration between our two hospitals.”

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