

Call this doctor when disaster strikes

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Dr Ashok Gupta,
Senior Consultant
Plastic Surgeon,
with his patient
Deepak Vadhani at
Bombay Hospital,
Pic: Shashi Kant
Bajpai

Whenever disaster strikes, Dr Ashok Gupta, specialist in reconstructive microsurgery is here to offers his services to the authorities for free. He has operated on victims of the 1992-93 blasts and riots, the Bhuj earthquake, the Kargil war, the Akshardham attack and the recent blast near the Mumbadevi temple.

A consultant plastic surgeon at Bombay Hospital, 52-year-old Dr Gupta had rushed to the GT Hospital when he received news of the recent blasts. An M.S. (Gen. Surgery) from Nagpur University, Dr Gupta is also a post-graduate in plastic surgery. After completing his Post-doctoral Fellowship in microsurgery from Virginia, USA he was awarded Honorary FRCS from the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh, UK.

Earlier, he had also written to the Prime Minister offering medical assistance during the Kargil war and to the Pramukh Swami of the Swami Narayan sect and Union Home Minister L K Advani after the Akshardham attack.

Lack of planned disaster management, according to the doctor, is a major drawback of the city's health infrastructure. "We should have one central organisation at the site that can keep tabs on how many patients are sent to each hospital. This would be better than flooding just one or two hospitals," Dr Gupta said.

This would also ensure that victims who need specialised care are taken to hospitals that have the required specialty. “This would save crucial time and lives,” Dr Gupta said.

Injuries from August 25’s blasts were comparatively less severe than those from the 1993 blasts, Dr Gupta observed. “It was probably because the ’93 blasts occurred in closed places that were thickly crowded. This time there was a less indirect impact of the blast – like injuries from shattering glass etc.,” he said.

“Whoever is to blame for these blasts, they have obviously not seen the suffering they cause. No amount of money or sympathy can compensate that kind of pain. It is not worth it,” Dr Gupta added.

People caught in a blast suffer multiple, high-velocity injuries to multiple organs. Typically, those wounded have to undergo multiple surgeries and deal with severe mental trauma.

“One patient kept asking me when he would recover completely. When I asked him why, he said he wanted to kill those responsible,” Dr Gupta recalled.

Dr Gupta's patients

August 25, 2003

Mumbadevi blast

Deepak Vadhani was running late. "I was walking towards the blast site when suddenly everything went black," Vadhani said. Vadhani's family shifted him from JJ Hospital to Bombay Hospital. "He had multiple injuries. There were burns. A splinter had cut through the muscle of his forearm and pierced a blood vessel. Two more splinters were lodged inside a major coronary artery. There was a five-inch deep cut in his thigh muscles," Dr Gupta said. Vadhani underwent surgery to reconstruct his artery, remove the splinters and for muscle repair. He also underwent skin grafting.

September 24, 2003

Attack on the Akshardham temple, Gujarat

Four bullets hit Hitesh Dhariya when terrorists attacked Akshardham. He was unable to move his left shoulder and had no sensation and mobility in his right arm and fingers. He also sustained two bullet wounds in his right waist. Dhariya underwent a 10-hour surgery on January 7 at Bombay Hospital. The microsurgical procedure involved removing four inches of damaged nerve and replacing it with one from the leg. "We also filled all the damaged muscles and did skin grafting," Dr Gupta said.

January 26, 2001

Earthquake at Bhuj, Gujarat

Razia (15) was stuck waist-down in rubble for three days. At one time, rescue workers contemplated cutting off one leg, which had become infected. They, however, managed to clear the rubble and pull out the 15-year-old girl. She was brought to Bombay Hospital with an infected leg wound and muscle and bone loss. There was also damage to her muscles, bone and blood vessels. She underwent surgery where extensive repairs to her nerves, blood vessels were carried out, improving blood supply to her legs.

May 6- May 20, 1999

Kargil War

Pawan Kumar, a sergeant in the army at the front during the Kargil war, stepped on a landmine. The mine exploded, leaving him with one arm and one leg amputated and one arm paralysed because of the brachial fractures. He underwent a twelve-hour operation to make his arm more workable and powerful. His paralysis also lessened.

December 1992-January 1993

Babri Masjid riots

Dr Gupta attended to a stab injury at Saifee Hospital at 10 pm. He operated on the boy under local anaesthesia. By the time he finished, he was called to Bombay Hospital to attend to another stab injury.

March 12, 1993

Serial bomb blasts

"We began operating on Friday and continued till Tuesday, taking 30-minute breaks in between," Dr Gupta said. Around 13 patients were brought to Bombay Hospital. This included a traffic warden who had stopped the driver of the car carrying the bombs from the parking lot inside the Air-India basement. The warden was brought in with a splinter that had cut through the nerves of the neck and was resting on his carotid