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Title : Just 15% of head-injury victims make it

Author : DurgeshNandan Jha

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# Just 15% of head-injury victims make it

## HEADING TOWARDS DISASTER

The poor outcome of severe traumatic head injury is well known, but what happens to those who survive has not been documented

### SHOCKING RESULTS

► Only 102 families of patients discharged from May 2010 to February 2013 could be contacted

► Of this, only 16 (15.7%) patients had a good outcome. They were able to gain consciousness after six months of injury

► 32 (31.4%) remained in a vegetative state six months after getting discharged

► Majority of patients, 54 (52.9%) out of 102, died within six months



### POINTS TO PONDER

► AIIMS Trauma Centre alone gets close to 800 such cases every year

► Few patients survive, but those who do require rehabilitation

► In absence of any social security scheme, government must arrange for rehabilitation to save lives

Severe traumatic head injury, like one caused in a road accident, is common in India

## Most Either Die Or Remain Unconscious After Discharge

DurgeshNandan.Jha  
@timesgroup.com

**New Delhi:** Only 15% of the patients with severe head injuries, who are discharged from hospital in an unconscious state, gain consciousness ever. The rest either die or remain in a vegetative state. This came to light after a follow-up of patients discharged from AIIMS Trauma Center from May 2010 to February 2013.

Dr Deepak Agrawal, senior neurosurgeon, said a total of 1,525 patients were admitted to the centre during this period. The families were called after six months to check on the status of the patients, mostly the road accident victims.

"Of these, 166 (10.9%) were unconscious while being discharged from the hospital—139

men and 27 women with a mean age of 33.9 years. Telephonic follow-up was available in 102 (61.4%) cases, and we found most of them had died or were still in a vegetative state," he said, adding that only 16 (15.7%) patients had a good outcome during six months following the injury.

In India, and particularly in Delhi, the incidence of road accidents are high and so is the number of people suffering from severe head injury, said doctors. "Road accidents are preventable and there is an urgent need to focus on awareness campaigns to ensure safety measures. But the government must also make provision for rehabilitation of terminally-ill patients so that their families do not have to suffer," said Dr Agrawal.

**In India, particularly in Delhi, the incidence of road mishaps is high and so is the number of people suffering from severe head injuries**

Those patients who are discharged in an unconscious state are often particularly difficult to manage at home and are prone to bed sores, respiratory infections, inadequate nutrition and physiotherapy.

At the trauma centre, officials said there are 52 beds in the neurosurgery department. Of this, 20 to 30 are blocked by patients suffering from severe head or spinal injury. "Earlier, most head or spinal injury patients would die within days due to respiratory failure. With ad-

vancement in technology, it is possible to keep them alive and in some cases recovery of organ function has also been observed. However, we cannot block precious beds for years together in hope of a miracle," said a senior doctor.

But the families of such patients have a different story to tell. "My father, who is no more, remained in coma for four months after he met with an accident. The doctors at the private superspecialty hospital did tell us there was little hope and sent him home. But we could not have left him to die. We shifted him to another private hospital in Noida. If there was a social security system or rehabilitation plan from the government, it could have saved us from penury," said Manish Kumar, a Noida resident.