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The Spinal Foundation launched for SCI persons

Special Correspondent

Birth anniversary of Mary Verghese commemorated



Resilient spirit: Patients with two spinal cord injury giving a dance performance from their wheelchairs at the launch of The Spinal Foundation at the Rehabilitation Institute of CMC in Vellore on Monday.— Photo: C. Venkatachalapathy

There are innumerable persons throughout the country who have sustained spinal cord injuries (SCI) in accidents and have become paraplegics (persons suffering from paralysis below the waist), quadriplegics (persons with paralysis of all four limbs) and tetraplegics (persons with paralysis of the body below the neck) who lead their lives on wheelchair.

There are several voluntary organisations, mostly run by the patients themselves as a self-help body to help themselves and others in similar condition through coordination with various agencies for treatment and rehabilitation.

In order to network these bodies functioning in different States for the common welfare of the SCI patients, The Spinal Foundation (TSF) was launched simultaneously in New Delhi and Vellore on Monday, May 26, coinciding with the birth anniversary of Mary Verghese, founder of the Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Department and the Rehabilitation Institute of the Christian Medical College, Vellore.

Participating in the function organised at the Mary Verghese Rehabilitation Institute here to mark the launch of The Spinal Foundation and the birth anniversary of Mary Verghese, P. Suresh Krishna, Member of the Governing Board of the Foundation and an SCI patient himself said that the TSF is an attempt to integrate and network all the voluntary self-help bodies of SCI patients functioning in different States in order to address their problems. Persons involved in the self-help bodies are not only from different States, but also from different backgrounds.

“Therefore, we have decided to network them through the TSF in order to ensure the treatment and rehabilitation of the SCI patients through effective exchange of information and mutual help,” he said. Recalling the services of Mary Verghese to SCI patients, Mary Minitha, an SCI patient in the Rehabilitation Institute said that Mary Verghese started the Rehab Institute in 1954 when she became a paraplegic herself following an accident, so as to help SCI patients who were a neglected lot till then. A confident person she operated on patients from her wheelchair. She started a Postgraduate Diploma Course in Rehabilitation. “She conquered her disability and became an expert surgeon,” she said.

George Tharyon, Professor and Head of the Department of PMR, CMC, said that Mary Verghese did not give up her ambition to become a doctor after suffering a SCI.

She did higher studies in the U.S. and Australia, came back to India and started the PMR in the CMC. As a single person, she went in a car, met and treated the SCI patients.

“She addressed the problems of the SCI by reaching out to the whole of India,” he said.

Mr. Suresh Krishna said that the registered office of the TSF would function at the Rehab Institute in Bagayam, Vellore, while its administrative office would be in New Delhi.

While TSF is headed by Major H.P.S. Ahluwalia, a Mount Everest climber and hero of the 1965 India-Pak war in which he sustained SCI, it will have S. Vaidyanathan, a peer counsellor at the Mary Verghese Rehabilitation Institute as secretary.

A cultural programme including singing and dance by SCI patients was held as part of the twin functions.

