

Medically induced coma saves 11-yr-old encephalitis patient

Sumati.Yengkhom@timesgroup.com

Kolkata: Jovial, playful and good in academics, Ashraful loves being with friends in school. But a swelling in the brain developed in July this year put the 11-year-old's activities to a halt.

But, a medically induced coma by doctors at Fortis Hospitals, Kolkata, has not only saved the boy's life, but also put him back on track.

The Class-IV student of an English medium school in Barrackpore got a sudden onset of encephalitis in September. Bouts of convulsions knocked the boy out to unconsciousness. His family members in Nadia's Tehatta rushed him to a nursing home in

Krishnagore. When a few days' treatment on ventilation yielded no improvement, he was shifted to Fortis Hospitals in Anandapur.

Doctors first tried a drug called midazolam which normally work on patients with brain injury. In addition to a cocktail of four anti-

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convulsion drugs, three attempts by midazolam failed to control the seizures as each time doctor took him off the dosage of the drug, the convulsion returned. Options were running out for doctors as severe convulsions could have damaged Ashraful's brain beyond a re-

pair or even cause death.

"That is when we decided to use medically induced coma as the last resort," said Agni Sekhar Saha, a paediatric intensivist at Fortis Hospitals.

Doctors used thiopental, an anesthetic, to induce the coma. Thiopental is used as a single injection to induce anesthesia under general condition. But in Ashraful's case, the barbiturate was infused continuously to induce the coma to stop almost every function of the brain.

"We continued infusing the drug till we got the burst suppression, the deepest possible coma, monitoring the amount of suppression through a series of EEGs. It is almost like hitting a re-



Ashraful after his treatment

Ashraful recognized his parents after coming out of coma. But, he could not recognize other relatives. He is now trying to learn everything anew

set button on the brain so that it rests and heals itself," said Saha.

The boy was kept in this condition for four days after which the crucial wake up process was started by gradual withdrawal of thiopental.

If the convulsions returned, it would have meant a deadlock with no other treatment option left. Doctors also started to find out if

his brain functions properly.

"The convulsions were gone and as the boy gradually woke up, we could see progressive signs of brain function such as attempt to breathe and blinking of eyes. When we were confident about the improvement, we took him off ventilator after 25 days," said Saha.

The family was in tears when the boy asked for water three days after being off the ventilation. Rising medical bills forced the boy to be transferred to the Institute of Child Health for part of the recovery. He was finally discharged after being in hospital for about two months.

"When doctor told us about the process and also the risks involved, we were prepared for the

worst. It is nothing sort of a miracle that my son is back home and doing well. Our only worry is Ashraful's concern that he has to lose one academic year," his father Abu Taheer Sheikh told TOI.

The small-time trader had his relatives, including his brother, helping him pay the huge medical bill of Rs 10 lakh at Fortis Hospitals alone.

"My son was good in his studies. We have kept a private tutor at home for the time being till he resumes school from the next academic session," he said.

Though Ashraful recognized his parents after coming out of coma, he could not recognize other relatives. He is now trying to learn everything anew.