Pediatric cardiac surgery: need of the hour

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Respected Sir,

Pediatric cardiac surgery has always excited and thrilled me despite of many obstacles and hurdles in the path of becoming a pediatric cardiac surgeon. Till so far my exposure to pediatric cardiac surgery has been very less, but I think more and more of my fellow residents should seriously think of practicing it in future as scope and opportunities are vast, rewards are immeasurable and the excitement, challenge and glamour that it offers is very gratifying. Nothing gives more pleasure than saving a child from the jaws of death. The branch is full of emotional, physical and intellectual challenges. A long education and many sacrifices in personal and family life deter most of us from becoming a pediatric cardiac surgeon.

Why pediatric cardiac surgery in india

As per the guidelines of American College of Cardiology, there should be at least one pediatric cardiac programme every 5 million people. Accordingly India should have about 200 pediatric cardiac surgery centers, but there are only about 20 such centers in country, which have facilities for infant and neonatal cardiac surgery and the number of dedicated pediatric cardiologists and surgeons is meager as

compared to the enormous volume of workload. In India total number of pediatric cardiac surgeries performed is approx 10000 per year, which is a fraction of what is needed. About one lakh children are born every year with congenital heart defects in India. Thus, there is enormous requirement and scope for formally trained pediatric cardiologist and surgeons to provide the desired level of care to these unfortunate kids.

Michael Ruhlman in his book titled *Walk on Water: Inside an Elite Pediatric Surgical Unit* has very beautifully described the life inside a pediatric cardiac surgery unit and wrote “Pediatric Heart Surgeon has to have it all- the intellect and the skill, the grace and decisiveness, the sewing skill of the craniofacial plastic surgeon and the vascular surgeon, the millimetric precision of the neurosurgeon- and he had to be fast too... There was no other surgery in which precision combined with speed mattered so much. Add to that the need for imagination...”

The future

The future of pediatric cardiac surgery is bright in India if we focus on:

- 1) Developing interest in pediatric cardiac surgery among cardio thoracic and vascular surgery and general surgery residents by giving them enough exposure of pediatric cardiac surgery during their training schedule. To help develop such exposures, there should be exchange programmes between institutions.
- 2) We should also target Under Graduates, so they develop interest in this super specialty. Educational tour of congenital heart surgery operation theatre and unit should be organized for them. Surgical

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video shows with interactive sessions will also help in sowing the seeds of interest for this specialty in them.

- 3) Government and private sector both should come forward and open more and more institutions where pediatric heart surgery can be done. All should realize their responsibility to the society, which needs such centers. It should not be viewed in terms of financial returns only, but as a necessity of the society in which we live. Institutions with a financially successful adult cardiac programmes,

should come forward in starting a pediatric cardiac surgery unit so that initial set backs can be absorbed easily.

I think it is the responsibility of all of us to provide our children the best of health care available and minimize their sufferings from cardiac illnesses. Surgical cure of all congenital malformations of heart should be our aim not the palliation, till we are intelligent enough to prevent them from occurring by genetically modifying the defective genes responsible for them.