

Exclusive Interview

Creating excellence in healthcare

Hailing from Bangalore, R. Basil is an Electrical Engineering graduate from the College of Engineering, Trivandrum who did his M. Tech in Power Systems Engineering from Cochin University of Science & Technology. Since then he has worked in three different sectors — Power Systems Engineering, Medical Systems and Healthcare Management.

Before joining STS Holdings Ltd., Bangladesh, the parent company of Apollo Hospitals Dhaka as its Executive Director and CEO, he held various senior leadership positions such as Vice-President of Wipro-GE Medical Systems, Managing Director and CEO of the Manipal Hospitals Group and Executive President of Apollo Hospitals Group of India.

Some of the pioneering initiatives which Basil introduced back in 2002 have become an integral part of the healthcare industry's evolving standards in ensuring quality. Recently he shared some of his views with The Daily Star.

The interview was taken by Amitava Kar. **How did you get into healthcare?** I worked for a power systems company for the first 12 years of my career. Afterwards, I had an opportunity to work for General Electric — Wipro-GE Medical Systems where I held several positions including Head of Business Processes, eventually becoming the Vice President of the company. I was living in Bangalore then. One day I had to

take my little kid to a hospital. The service was so poor that I promised never to go back there again. Two years later, the owners of that hospital came to me seeking my help in transforming their institution. These were people well known for their medical education programmes. Hospitals were part of their medical colleges. But they did not know how to run stand-alone hospitals. Initially reluctant, I looked at it as a leadership opportunity. Over the years I have become passionate about it. I can touch lives.

How would you reflect on your time in Dhaka? Healthcare has a tremendous opportunity here. Many Bangladeshis go abroad for medical treatment. It seems that they do not have good trust in local hospitals. Private hospitals are expensive. I started benchmarking and identifying the gaps. I focused on 3 parameters: clinical excellence, friendliness to patients and transparency and ethical practice.

For example, a patient is given an estimate of how much a surgery will cost. At the end of the day the bill could be more than what was promised. That creates dissatisfaction in the mind of the patient. So we created package prices and told the staff that for no reason could the final bill be more than that. If it is, we should absorb it. We also started offering the most complex surgeries for which a lot of patients are going abroad. The



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

R. Basil, CEO of Apollo Hospitals, Dhaka

result was amazing. Our patient volume went up.

What are the main challenges that private hospitals face in Bangladesh?

The first is the lack of clinical talents. People want to invest in hospitals. But how do you get good doctors? The medical colleges will have to have more seats for postgraduate studies. Public and private medical colleges have to enhance the quality of their curricula. Students should have global exposure. We should produce efficient paramedical staff — lab technicians, X-ray technicians and nurses. And then there is the issue of management. The organisational culture should be such that the management team should be given enough professional space to make tough decisions.

Why is treatment so expensive in private hospitals?

It is a great challenge to run a capital-intensive hospital profitably. The capital expenditure is very high. An MRI machine costs 30-40% higher here than in India due to duty and taxes. The manpower is also expensive as some hospitals bring in doctors and nurses from abroad. In order to reduce costs, hospitals must create higher volumes. And for that hospitals should focus on clinical excellence, patient friendliness and transparency and ethical practices because trust matters.

Why do patients have to undergo so many tests?

It is the duty of a doctor or whoever is dealing with a patient to explain clearly at every step what

they are doing and why they are doing it. That builds credibility. Oftentimes, doctors do not spend time with patients. That is why there may be a feeling of apprehension among the patients. They may feel like hospitals are out there just to make money. It is all because there was not proper communication. We train junior doctors how to communicate, what to communicate, how to break the bad news.

What leads to wrong diagnosis?

Before you release a report, you are supposed to give the sample to another referral centre for a second opinion. This is part of the process. Chances of error come down when more than one person is involved. Now imagine a hospital that has no such standardisation in place.

What is the way forward?

A lot more hospitals and doctors are needed. Life expectancy has gone up significantly. Geriatrics has not really grown as a subspecialty in Bangladesh. People should have health insurance. The government can come on board with a strong but friendly insurance policy. IT systems should be robust. The management of insurance largely depends on a powerful IT structure.

Hospitals have to go for standardisation. There are several processes. Once you follow them, you have an institutional process. It is based on defined clinical pathways and protocols. It is not left to a few individuals to do certain things according to their will.

DOCTOR'S CHAMBER

Fever is common, but causes may not

PROF M KARIM KHAN

Tahsin a ten years old boy is my regular patient. Recently he came to me with fever, cough, malaise and headache for seven days. There was no specific signs and according to history fever was not very characteristic for any specific disease. He was given paracetamol and asked to come back after three days if problem still persisted.

I requested Tahsin's mother to make a temperature chart. After three days they came back with a temperature chart. Mother was a bit worried as there was no improvement of the symptoms. Temperature chart showed irregular fever. This time I asked for some lab tests including Febrile antigen. Rickettsial infection was found positive. After administration of Doxycycline he was cured.

Fever is a common symptoms of many disease and sometimes pinpoint diagnosis even after many lab tests cannot be ascertain. So suspicion of some rare diseases to be kept in mind.

Now a days occasionally we get rickettsial infections. There are various types of rickettsial diseases. These are spread by some arthropod like ticks, mites, lice, fleas etc. History of bite or mark of bite are often missed if there is no sore at the site of bite. Usually symptoms are fever, headache, cough, malaise, rash etc. that mimics many diseases. Incubation period is three to ten days. Infections are not transmitted from person to person. It is a vector borne disease.

Treatment by antibiotics can cure the disease. There is no vaccine yet for rickettsia. Personal protection from bites of arthropod wearing long sleeved clothes, cleaning the kitchen, bed rooms and surrounding bushes may help. Isolation of infected person from kids is helpful.

Please take care of your beloved Kids.

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HEALTH bulletin

Health effects of Ramadan

STAR HEALTH DESK

Millions of Muslims around the world are observing their annual spiritual fast, steering clear of daylight eating, drinking and smoking.

Fasting can be risky — it can cause daytime fatigue, headaches and weakness — so the elderly, the very young, the sick and pregnant women are exempt. But, research has shown the practice has some wide-ranging health benefits too — if done right.

Lose weight
It goes without saying that weight loss is far from being the point of Ramadan. But because eating is only permitted after dark, many people consume less food during day time than they would usually, and so they do lose weight.

According to a 2012 study in the medical journal Public Health Nutrition, people lose an average of 1.24 Kg by the end of Ramadan.

Weight loss has many benefits, especially for obese people, including lowering the risk of heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure. But the research shows most people regain the lost weight in only two weeks after ending the fast.

The authors note that the month provides an opportunity to start losing weight but "structured and consistent lifestyle modifications are necessary to achieve life-lasting weight loss".

Prevent headaches
Fasting can increase your chances of experiencing headaches, according

to a literature review published in the medical journal Headache. The researchers found many possible causes for this, including caffeine withdrawal, low blood sugar and dehydration.

Elliot Shevel, a migraine expert who heads up The Headache Clinic — a private group of specialised facilities in South Africa — says there are ways to prevent head pain associated with foregoing caffeine during a Ramadan fast. "Patients can often prevent headaches by reducing caffeine consumption in the weeks leading up to their fast." He says another strategy to prevent caffeine withdrawal would be to have one very strong cup of coffee before the start of the fast each day.

Quit smoking
Ramadan has been used by a number of public health authorities to

encourage smokers to quit the habit as they are forced to abstain from tobacco each day of the holy month. Regular smokers will experience withdrawal symptoms such as mood swings, anxiety, headaches, nausea and fatigue, according to an article in the journal Addiction. The article explains, if smokers continue to use tobacco in the evening hours, Ramadan period will likely be an uncomfortable experience.

But if they maintain their abstinence day and night, withdrawal symptoms will subside in time. They say "the prohibition against smoking during the day and the absence of other smoking could assist the quit attempt", making the holy month a good catalyst for nicotine addicts wanting to stop the habit. It might be a good time to kick other bad habits as well.



Benefits of isabgol

Isabgol is a natural product which is a common household item found in almost every home in Bangladesh. There are many benefits that make isabgol a wonderful and healthy supplement that can be used on daily basis.

- 1. Relieves constipation:** Isabgol has decent amount of soluble and insoluble fiber that helps to make it a good cure for constipation.
- 2. Natural remedy for diarrhoea:** It helps hardens the stools to deal with diarrhoea.
- 3. Improves digestion:** Isabgol is rich in fiber that assists in the digestion of meals you eat.
- 4. Isabgol cleanse colon:** It has hygroscopic properties, which makes it a good colon cleanser.
- 5. Relieves from acidity:** Isabgol husk covers the stomach by coating with a defensive layer and safeguards it from the burning annoyance caused by acidity.
- 6. Lowers cholesterol:** It forms a thin layer around intestinal walls and avoids the absorption of cholesterol from the food and efficiently lowers the amount of serum cholesterol in the blood.
- 7. Prevents diabetes:** Isabgol has a natural substance gelatin that helps in slowing down the process of breakdown and absorption of glucose into the body. Therefore, It helps control diabetes.



Voluntary unpaid blood donations must increase

Voluntary, unpaid blood donations must be increased rapidly in more than half the world's countries in order to ensure a reliable supply of safe blood for patients whose lives depend on it, WHO said on World Blood Donor Day on June 14.

This year, the theme of World Blood Donor Day was "Blood connects us all", highlighting the common bond that all people share in their blood. The slogan, "Share life, give blood", draws attention to the role that voluntary donation systems play in encouraging people to care for one another and promoting community cohesion.

About 108 million blood donations are collected globally every year. Nearly 50% of these blood donations are collected in high-income countries, home to less than 20% of the world's population.

However, in many countries, demand exceeds supply, and blood services face the challenge of making sufficient blood available, while also ensuring its quality and safety.

Ovarian Cyst

An ovarian cyst is a fluid-filled sac that develops on a woman's ovary; they are very common and do not usually cause any symptoms

Signs and symptoms:

An ovarian cyst will usually only cause symptoms if it splits (ruptures), is very large, or it blocks the blood supply to the ovaries. In these cases, you may have:

- Pelvic pain - this can range from a dull, heavy sensation to a sudden severe and sharp pain
- Pain during sex
- Difficulty emptying your bowels
- A frequent need to urinate
- Heavy periods, irregular periods or lighter periods than normal
- Bloating and a swollen tummy
- Feeling very full after only eating a little
- Difficulty getting pregnant

Prevention:

Although there's no definite way to prevent the growth of ovarian cysts, regular pelvic examinations are a way to help ensure that changes in your ovaries are diagnosed as early as possible. In addition, be alert to changes in your monthly cycle, including symptoms that may accompany menstrual Period that aren't typical for you or that persist over more than a few cycles. Talk with your doctor about any changes that concern you.

