

Monsoon had arrived and it had been raining quite heavily in New Delhi. The combination of receding summer heat and heavy rains had made the weather unbearably humid. Thankfully, the Dermatology outpatients in All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), where I spent most of my time was centrally air conditioned. After the initial struggle with administrative clerks who had lost my application for visiting fellowship and its official approval, I began my ten-day BSDS sponsored-vitiligo surgery fellowship in one of India's most premier dermatology institute.

Prior to leaving India in early 2002, I did have some exposure to vitiligo surgery techniques, primarily punch and blister grafting. These had now become a lost art as I had not practiced these techniques for over 8 years. Moreover, surgical treatments for vitiligo have now come of age. Dermatologic surgeons in AIIMS have not remain untouched by the concept of 'stem cells therapy' and are now employing a novel technique based on this concept to treat a carefully selected group of vitiligo patients.

Small punch biopsies are taken from the occipital scalp and the hair follicle bearing skin is transported to the stem cell laboratory for washing and trypsinization. Concentrated hair follicle suspension is obtained by centrifuging the specimen. This is then applied to the dermabraded recipient site prior to it being dressed. Patients are then commenced on PUVASOL (Psoralen and sunlight exposure) or UVB and reviewed at 1 week and 2 -3 months. The results of this minimally invasive treatment are quite impressive and will be published in the near future. Besides stem cell transplantation, blister grafts are also commonly used especially for sites such as the lips.

In addition to vitiligo surgery, I observed several other dermatological surgical procedures and laser surgery in the unit and sat in one of the leprosy clinics. I was quite impressed by the number of lasers the department had acquired, which is perhaps the reflection of the increased funding the institute has witnessed over the last few years. I attended an educational professorial ward round where I saw several complex and tropical dermatoses and learnt that like in the UK, dermatology beds in AIIMS were under a constant threat from other specialities. I was invited to attend a dermatology seminar and a case conference and given an opportunity to share my laser and Mohs experience with the faculty and residents, which I gracefully accepted and which I felt was well received.

It was also great to catch up with some old friends in Delhi but most of my time was spent indoors as the weather was far from perfect. Wrong choice of month to visit India, I suppose. It was nice to be back in Manchester where it had been raining as usual but it was pleasantly cooler!

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