

# Hindustan Times

3<sup>rd</sup> December

## Hospitals lend a helping hand

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*HC-6/pc-6*

**NEW DELHI:** When Nekram Upadhyay, 34, was pursuing his master's degree in rehabilitation engineering and assistive technology in University of Illinois in the United States, he had no idea about what the future had in store for him.

Having contracted polio in early childhood, Upadhyay had a difficult time growing up. While he was lucky to have bagged a scholarship for admission into a prestigious university, he did not have a clue about how this unique field of study — which helps people with physical deformity get mobile with the use of custom made assistive tools — could be put to use in India.

"No hospital in India had a vacancy for such specialisation four years ago. When I discussed this with my thesis advisor in the US, he suggested me to send my proposal with my interest in opening a department to Indian Spinal Injuries Centre (ISIC)," said Upadhyay, who walks using a knee brace.

"The administration here was so receptive that they not just accepted my proposal, but gave me all the independence and



■ Jyoti Vidhani, programme manager at the department of assistive technology in ISIC, with a patient.

space to build my department. I have been working in the capacity of the head of the department for the last four years and I want more specially-abled people in my team," he said.

Upadhyay was indeed fortunate, as no other hospital till date has a department or vacancy for rehabilitation using assistive technology. ISIC has several jobs position, which are open for the specially-abled.

Hospitals it seems have led the way in opening up their arms by offering them employment. "Unlike other set ups, most hospitals treat the specially able with a lot of dignity, which is important," said Shivjeet Singh Raghav, 51, peer counsellor and patient education co-ordinator: Raghav himself is a quadriplegic, who has been wheelchair-bound for the past 30 years.



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