

World Leprosy Day 2017 Case Study: Poonam



Sixteen-year-old Poonam

Possessing a cheeky smile and giggle, 16-year-old Poonam likes hanging out with her friends in her rural village in India.

This beautiful girl's ordeal with leprosy began when she was just 13. It started as patches on her neck, but soon spread to her hand. "I was worried when I first got it," Poonam remembers. "I didn't understand why I was getting injuries on my hand." She was finding it difficult to hold onto objects or carry things, the result of a claw hand that was starting to form.

After a year of these symptoms, she was finally diagnosed with leprosy by a local clinic and sent to our partner, Vadala Mission Hospital, where she received the cure for leprosy, ongoing

treatment, reconstructive hand surgery and physiotherapy.

What's more, a month after Poonam started receiving treatment, the Vadala Mission Hospital sent a field health worker to check her family members, and her mother was identified as having leprosy.

Poonam's mother was fortunate; women are disproportionately affected by leprosy because many miss out on early diagnosis and treatment. This delay can result in impairments or crippling disabilities that often accompany the disease.



Poonam's hand, post-surgery

Today, Poonam is a picture of health, though one finger is slightly bent. Her doctor and physiotherapist encourage her to take better care of her hand. They explain she should be doing massaging and exercises at home so that the hand can fully heal.

Poonam looks sheepish, but doesn't seem too concerned. "She is well otherwise," Dr. Prabhakar sighs. "She says she is worried a little bit for her future – that her hand might not get back to normal, but I tell her that for that to happen she MUST do her exercises!"

With some hard work, there could soon be no remaining trace of Poonam's clawed hand. Instead of leprosy leaving her with a lifelong disability, thanks to the excellent medical care she has received, Poonam can now look forward to a full, happy life.

2016 UPDATE: Poonam has been married for the last two years and lives with her in-laws and husband. She is regularly taking care of her hands and feet. Poonam is happy because her husband and new family take good care of her.



Poonam with Dr. Prabhakar at Vadala Mission Hospital

All photos by Tom Bradley