

How the ICU came home

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From ventilators to doctors on call, intensive care services are now at your doorstep

On January 2, 77-year-old D C Gambhir slipped in his bathroom and lost consciousness. After spending two months in a Faridabad hospital, Gambhir now lies comatose in the guestroom of his home, which has been converted into a make-shift ICU. His medical bed is surrounded by a vacuum suction machine, an oxygen cylinder, a cardiac monitor and other life-saving equipment.

Although his condition has not improved his son, Vikas, says that taking care of him at home, with services of Critical Care Unified, was easier and safer after his vital parameters stabilised.

“When he was in the ICU, he got really bad bed sores. ICU staff was not able to provide personalised care to every patient. And the problem is compounded if the patient is not able to communicate. If you keep a patient in the ICU beyond a certain point, then the fight is against hospital-acquired infections rather than the original problem,” says Vikas. “At home his infection levels are contained and I can be with him as much as I want. In the hospital I could meet him only for 15 minutes, twice a day. Mentally, I am at ease now.”

An ICU visit can be traumatic for patients as well as their attendants. Now, companies like Philips, Dabur and some startups are offering the option at home.

Philips Healthcare@home, India launched ICU@home service last year in Delhi-NCR and is currently looking after 10-25 patients, says [Richa Singh](#), business leader, Philips. “With an ageing population, awareness and higher incidence of nuclear families, there is a huge demand for critical care at home,” says Singh. Dr Gaurav Thukral, COO, HealthCare at Home adds: “People are now realizing that it is possible to treat critical care patients at home with services at par with hospitals.”

Cost is one of the main reasons why people are opting for home ICU services. An ICU stay in a private hospital can cost anywhere between Rs 30,000 and Rs 50,000 per day. “At home the cost comes down to Rs 7,500 to Rs 12,500 per day,” says Rajiv Mathur, CEO of Critical Care Unified, a health startup that began operations in Delhi-NCR in December 2016. It has serviced to 630 patients so far and recently launched in Mumbai.

In the past five years, India’s home healthcare market has become more organised. Going beyond physiotherapy and rehabilitation, home healthcare services now include critical and palliative care.

In September last year, 78-year-old [Satish Kumar Mathur](#) suffered respiratory failure. His family rushed him to a private hospital in Paschim Vihar, Delhi where he was put on a ventilator for 12 days. Once his condition

improved, he was taken home. “He was still critical. He needed oxygen and couldn’t sit on his own. We hired home ICU services from Philips to take care of him. Now, he can walk with support and he hasn’t used an oxygen mask in the past 25 days or so,” says [Navneet Mathur](#), his son-in-law.

Vipin Pathak, CEO of Care24, a healthcare startup, says 30% of his revenue comes from critical-care patients. “There is shortage of 7 lakh hospital beds in India and the quickest, quality-assured, safe way to address this shortfall is to convert home beds into hospital beds,” he says.

Setting up an ICU at home requires an uncluttered space, which is disinfected. Power back-up and stabilizers are put in place for 24x7 power. “We shift the patient home only after the hospital give us a go-ahead,” says Mathur of Critical Care Unified.

ICU-on-rent may find ready users but doctors suggest caution. While ICU-on-rent may find ready users, doctors suggest caution. Dr Vijay D’Silva, director, medical affairs and critical care, Asian Heart Institute, Mumbai says the “home ICU” is a misnomer and a money-making racket. “You cannot replicate ICU care at home. An ICU is a place where everything is available under one roof and care is provided by highly trained people who can detect problems and treat them. What will you do if there’s an emergency at home? These companies provide doctors from allied fields, like ayurveda, homoeopathy. You cannot trust them with medical complications,” he warns.

Critical stats:

Cost: Rs 7,500 to Rs 12,500 per day

Space needed: 10 x 12 ft room at the least

Must have: 24 x 7 power back-up

Machines: Ventilator/BiPAP/CPAP, suction machine, cardiac table, DVT pump etc

Cons: In case of an emergency the patient will have to be rushed to a hospital