

I've treated more lethal war wounds in Syria than I had imagined,' says Nashik doctor

By Darshana Daga on July 20, 2017

Orthopaedic surgeon Dr Gopal Shinde worked in Syria as part of Doctors Without Borders' from April to June 2017



Thousands of lives are stake in war zones such as Syria. Tending the wounded and the ill becomes a bigger challenge in places like these, especially since local healthcare services are nearly negligible. Doctors, who are assigned the task of looking after people at war zones, work amidst several challenges, and Dr Gopal Shinde, an orthopaedic surgeon from Nashik, is one such example.

"I have treated more lethal war wounds than I could ever imagine. The war in Syria is more insidious than what I had read in media reports. I went there to offer my services with apolitical approach. I did not see whether the person is terrorist or civilian, while amputating his or her arms and legs," said Dr Shinde, who was in Jordon between April and June, 2017. He was part of the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) or Doctors Without Borders' Al Ramtha Clinic in Jordan which is three miles away from the Syrian border.

War affected people from Syria and elsewhere are treated at the clinic free of cost. MSF is the international humanitarian medical aid organisation that is active in 69 countries, and serves populations affected by epidemics, armed conflicts, natural calamities and man-made disasters. During a chat with My Medical Mantra, Dr Shinde recounted his unique experiences.

My Medical Mantra (MMM): Many medical personnel have been killed in conflict zones. It is deliberate 'weaponisation' of disease when pace of attacks on healthcare facilities in Syria is escalating. Did these attacks and deaths of doctors not deter you from going to Jordan?



Dr Gopal Shinde

Dr Gopal Shinde (GS): Death can encounter me anywhere. One day death will encounter me; no one can predict death. I have been motivated by Dr Ida Scudder, Dr Dwarkanath Kotnis and Swami Vivekanand, who have been visionaries and have gone beyond their calling to serve the society.

MMM: What prompted you to serve in conflict zones?

GS: I wanted to learn how things can be managed during crisis and emergency situations. I have learnt a lot in three months. I know how the furniture arrangement should be in emergency rooms, what drugs should be there and so on. I wanted to represent my country. It is an emergency for one section of humanity, and it is a duty of people from other parts of the world to help them out in times of crisis.

MMM: How would you explain the collapse of healthcare services in Syria and other conflict zones?

GS: There are no provisions for something as basic as vaccination in certain war zones. There is an outbreak of cholera in Yemen. Infectious diseases that were very much in control earlier have spread rapidly in these areas.

MMM: How did you manage to not to bring in your emotions while treating the patients there?

GS: MSF teaches you to be independent, impartial and apolitical. You should not see nationality, religion or profession of the patient. Medical neutrality should never be obliterated. I went there to treat my patients. If you panic, you are not fit for the job.

MMM: Could you share those experiences which touched your heart and offered a feeling of satisfaction for your service?

GS: A bracelet was kept in my room the day I was to start my journey back to India. A Jordanian health worker had kept it with a message that read: 'To that hand which saved hands of many'.

A 30-year-old war victim came to the clinic at around 2pm. He was so severely injured that I had to immediately amputate both his legs. His right hand was frozen. I took that risk of not amputating his hand. I made a deep cut from his arm to his fingers, trying to search for the blood vessel that was cut. After a four-hour surgery, I was able to make his hand warm again. Though I amputated his legs I was able to save his hand.

MMM: What kind of patients that you have treated there?

GS: I've mainly treated people with major bone injuries, bullet injuries, burn injuries, mine blast injuries and broken blood vessel injuries. I have seen patients with more than 100 splinters in their body, patients with 100% burns, hands and legs dangling, people with paralysed bodies from brain injuries and broken blood vessels.

MMM: How miserable is the condition of war-affected patients?

GS: A woman, who was seven months pregnant, came to our clinic just after her husband and two children were killed in a bomb blast. She came along with her seven-year-old daughter and one-and-half-year old son. The little girl had 60 per cent burns and her leg was dangling. The boy, who was put on artificial breathing, died after a few hours. Every patient goes through mental trauma. There is denial of the situation and aggression about it. This is followed by [depression](#) and slowly they begin to accept the situation.

MMM: What was your daily routine like over there?

GS: There was no routine. We used to remain on our toes for 24 hours. The clinic had 50 beds, but many-a-times it used to be flooded with more than 50 patients. The emergency vehicle used to have people who would be bleeding profusely, people with broken legs, burnt skin and blinded eyes. You don't think about the time if you get such patients.

MMM: How do you, not as a doctor, but as an independent individual look at the war?

GS: Thirst for money and power are the reasons behind all wars. Civilians should understand that there are people who want to sell their weapons by selling different stories to the world.

Dr Gopal Shinde is currently an assistant professor at Institute of Medical Science and Research in Nashik. During the initial period of his career, he was a medical officer at a primary health centre in Nandurbar in Maharashtra. He was an assistant professor at Government Medical College in Solapur earlier. He is an associate fellow of Indian health.

Dr Shinde has worked with the Central government in Jammu and Kashmir for a year and has offered health services there. He has also offered his services for free during the Nepal earthquake in 2015 and during the deluge in Chennai in the same year.

🖱 civil war, conflict zone, doctors, Doctors without borders, Jordan, Médecins Sans Frontières, Syria, Syria Crisis, Syrian civil war

Also Read

- Medical fraternity welcomes recommendations on surrogacy bill
- FOCUS conference 2017, kicks off with live surgeries
- A rare kind of corneal surgery performed by doctor at BOA FOCUS 2017
- 'ZEPTO' likely to be a game changer for cataract surgeries, says Dr Luthra
- BOA FOCUS 2017: Dr Mahipal Sachdev demonstrates microincision cataract surgery

