

THE TIMES OF INDIA, KOLKATA
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 26, 2017

Income nil, cancer cost ₹1.5L per month

Pic: Amit Moulick

Families At A Loss Over Yawning Gap

Prithvijit Mitra & Ajanta Chakrabarty | TNN

Kolkata: Samir Kumar Parui has exhausted all his savings on his 14-year-old son's treatment. Suman, his son, has been suffering from leukemia since 2015 and the disease has left the family on the verge of bankruptcy. Samir runs a grocery shop in East Midnapore and has spent more than Rs 3 lakh till date. A piece of land is all that he is left with now.

"If I have to continue the treatment for six months more, I must sell the land. That is the last piece of asset I have. Once the land is gone, I will have to depend on doles for treatment," said a helpless Samir.

Cancer treatment has been leaving thousands penniless across the state. Unless carefully planned, it could take a toll on the financial health of families, warn oncologists.

Take Nitumoni Mondol of Howrah, for instance. Her nine-year-old daughter Diprava was detected with blood cancer last year and the family has been running from pillar to post to arrange for funds. Earlier this year, the family received a grant of Rs 50,000 from the chief minister's fund. "Without the money, we would have been forced to give up. But the amount is now running out since my daughter has been undergoing chemotherapy. My husband has already exhausted all his savings and we must mortgage our house to pay for the next

ONE DISEASE, MANY CASUALTIES



Rakesh Das

- **Suffering from** | Liver cancer
- **Since** | January 2017
- **Family income** | Nil
- **Spent till date** | ₹3 lakh

6 I must return to my shop to support my wife and child. Despite the financial crisis, I have realized that I must hold on to my shop

Ramprasad Das | FATHER



Suman Kumar Parui

- **Suffering from** | Leukemia
- **Since** | 2015
- **Family income** | ₹8,000
- **Spent till date** | ₹3 lakh

6 If I have to continue the treatment for six months more, I must sell the land. That is the last piece of asset I have

Samir Kumar Parui | FATHER



Diprava Mondol

- **Suffering from** | Leukemia
- **Since** | 2016
- **Family income** | ₹10,000
- **Spent till date** | ₹1 lakh

6 My husband has already exhausted all his savings and we must mortgage our house to pay for the next chemotherapy cycle

Nitumoni Mondal | MOTHER

There are scores like Sukumar Roy, a labourer from West Midnapore who travel to Kolkata for treatment without adequate funds. Roy, for instance, has a BPL card and was admitted with to Saroj Gupta Cancer Centre and Research Institute for the fifth time last month. "I am too poor to get this disease," he exclaims.

A fourth of cancer patients in Kolkata can't afford even the initial cost of treatment, according to oncologist Gautam Mukhopadhyay. "Once they run out of savings, patients' families contemplate selling off their assets. I discourage the practice since it doesn't help in the long run. Pat-

tals and private ones to check the expenses. If planned carefully, it could save many from bankruptcy," said Mukhopadhyay, who is the secretary of Bengal Oncology, an organization that supports cancer patients.

But once the disease strikes, families press the panic button and planning goes for a toss, pointed out Subir Ganguly, senior oncologist and a vice-president of Bengal Oncology. "You need to have at least Rs 2 lakh in your kitty to complete a year of proper treatment. A substantial number of patients can't afford to spend the amount and need to be guided. They must go to government hospitals

sible option since you can't continue treatment solely on the basis of grants or donations. Selling off property could be disastrous," said Ganguly.

Ramprasad Das, the father of Rakesh, had almost sold off his grocery shop when his son was detected with liver cancer two months ago. Doctors at the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Cancer Research Institute dissuaded him. He applied for assistance from the chief minister's fund and received Rs 49,000 last month. It allowed him to complete his first chemotherapy cycle.

"I must apply for funds again," said Das, who has to travel between his village and Kolkata at least thrice a month. His shop has been

TREATMENT TRAUMA