

Tying rakhis & hope at cancer hospital

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Calcutta: Chemotherapy, surgery prep, intravenous channels, and the pain of cancer leave little room for anything else in the lives of children undergoing treatment.

Yet, they find time — and hope.

At Saroj Gupta Cancer Centre & Research Institute, children aged between six and 14 are now busy making *rakhis*.

For the past month, both in-patients and those in day care have been engaged in this festive craft. This weekend, they'll tie *rakhis* on one another — girls to boys and boys to girls — challenging the traditional gender roles the festival often reinforces.

"We want to convey the message that each one will stand for the other, and there are no gender-specific roles," said Papri Saha, art and music therapist at the hospital.

Most of the children are being treated for leukaemia.



Rakhi celebrations at Saroj Gupta Cancer Centre & Research Institute on Friday

with some fighting solid tumors, said an oncologist.

"A cancer diagnosis affects both the child and their parents mentally. Engaging them in activities they enjoy helps improve their compliance with treatment," said Arnab Gupta, director of the institute.

He explained that depression can worsen symptoms like nausea, vomiting, and irritability — ultimately affecting the treatment plan.

Many of these children stay in the hospital for four to six months.

"Most don't want to stay back. They miss school, family, and friends," said Saha. "We have to keep them engaged in things they enjoy. It's not easy — they're undergoing chemotherapy and often dealing with side effects."

Due to compromised immunity, the children are under strict restrictions, even within the hospital. "Some are confined to the bed. Since they can't come to the playroom, we take the activities to them. These are small ways to keep them motivated," said Saha.

Despite their pain, there's a strong sense of camaraderie.

A 14-year-old girl with a tumor on her right shoulder struggled to pull a thread — until another child, undergoing treatment for leukaemia, stepped in to help. A four-year-old, unable to make a *rakhi* himself, watched the others intently.

"They form a bond with the hospital, too. Many return after recovery during events and become stories of inspiration for others," said Gupta.