

The Tata Medical Center Fellowship Program in Pediatric Hematology-Oncology

Conceptualised in the year 2004 as a philanthropic initiative for the Eastern and North-Eastern parts of India and the neighbouring countries, the Tata Medical Center (TMC) started operations in Kolkata on May 16, 2011. The hospital is governed by a charitable trust – Tata Medical Centre Trust. It is an integrated Oncology facility with well-trained professional staff and equipped with modern facilities and the most contemporary medical equipment. Set up at a cost of Rs. 350 crores, the Hospital, with a capacity of 183 beds, serves all sections of the society, with 50% of the infrastructure earmarked for free or subsidized treatment for the underprivileged sections. The hospital provides a wide spectrum of services from diagnosis, therapy to rehabilitation and palliative support in cancer. The Institution's objective is to excel in service, education and research.

The Department

The department is focused on providing holistic care to children with cancer, acting as a referral center for complicated hematological problems, providing a comprehensive facility for stem cell transplantation, and collaborating closely with the Tata Translational Cancer Research Center (TTCRC). It currently has 12 dedicated beds, and is planned for an expansion to 50 beds by 2017.

There are four faculty members:

- Prof. Dr. Vaskar Saha is Professor of Pediatric Oncology at the University of Manchester and Director, TTCRC. His interest lies in malignant hematology and he is chief investigator of the first multicenter trial on acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ICiCLE) in India.
- Dr. Arpita Bhattacharya received her training in the United Kingdom and is the lead clinician; her interests lie in solid tumors and supportive care in cancer.
- Dr. Shekhar Krishnan has been an Associate Professor in University Mallaya following his training in London and leads the leukemia and biological studies; his areas of interests include benign and malignant hematology and stem cell transplantation.
- Dr. Anirban Das completed his DM in Pediatric Hematology-Oncology from PGIMER, Chandigarh and is the academic lead; his interests lie in benign hematology, solid tumors and supportive care.

The goal of the fellowship program is to nurture and develop excellent clinical scientists and compassionate physicians, trained to become future leaders in pediatric hematology-oncology in India. This will be accomplished through comprehensive education and training in clinical practice, laboratory services, and research methodology.

Objectives

To train a pediatrician having requisite postgraduate qualification (MD Pediatrics/ equivalent) as a specialist in Pediatric Hematology-Oncology, who would be able to:

1. Have a comprehensive understanding of the pathophysiology of pediatric hematological and oncological disorders.

2. Diagnose and provide comprehensive care to children with these disorders, including carrying out all necessary diagnostic and therapeutic procedures.
3. Interact with colleagues in allied disciplines (pathologists, radiologists, radiation oncologists, surgeons, palliative care, psychiatrist) for multi-disciplinary teamwork and providing shared care.
4. Counsel parents and relatives of the patient with empathy and compassion; develop special communication skills to deal in breaking bad news and managing bereavement.
5. Conduct teaching sessions, seminars and lectures; understand and execute research methodology and acquire competence in a selected research interest.

No of Fellowship Positions: Two per year

Qualification: MD/DNB (Pediatrics)/ equivalent

Fellowship Duration: Two years; can be extended by one year for deserving candidates

Training Program

a. Scope of in-patient experience

The candidates will learn the various aspects of management of oncological disorders of childhood. They are expected to develop an ongoing relationship with patients and their families and, under the guidance of a faculty member, take primary responsibility for establishing chemotherapy treatment plans, participating in surgical and radiotherapy treatment decisions, and treating complications of a disease or its therapy. They would perform specialized diagnostic and therapeutic procedures like marrow aspiration and biopsy, fine-needle aspiration, tru-cut biopsy, stem cell harvest, insertion of central venous catheters, intrathecal therapy, etc., and learn the use and maintenance of various equipment used for patient care.

b. Scope of outpatient experience

They would participate in the following clinics on a rotation basis, viz., pediatric oncology clinic, hematology clinic, day-care clinic, long-term follow-up clinic and peripheral clinics (radiation oncology, BMT, palliative care). They will be responsible for carrying out supervised services starting from initial screening, diagnosis, treatment and follow up of new patients and patients already registered with the hospital.

c. Service responsibilities

Fellows will participate in the night and weekend call schedule throughout the training program, including the duration of peripheral postings.

d. Academic responsibilities

The candidate is expected to actively participate in both departmental and interdepartmental educational meets including lectures, clinical conferences, research seminars, journal clubs, mortality/morbidity meets and joint conferences relevant to pediatric hematology-oncology. There will be didactic lectures by experts in the field; however lectures will not play a dominant role in the theoretical component of the training program. The trainee will acquire clinical experience by day-to-day management of all patients admitted in the unit. Faculty will be involved in teaching of trainees in the ward-rounds and outpatient clinics.

e. Research requirements

The candidate would be introduced to research methodologies and would be expected to complete over the 2 years of training, at least one major research project, under the guidance of a designated mentor. The candidate would also need to undertake independent audits and also actively associate with the ongoing research activities. He/she would be expected to present and publish the results of his/her research in conferences and journals of repute.

Expected rotations/ Work schema

During the fellowship, the candidates will spend their duty hours spaced out between inpatient, outpatient and daycare. Postings in allied departments (hemato-pathology, histopathology: 2 weeks each, and, radiation oncology, BMT: 4 weeks each) will be divided across semesters, matched to the service requirements of the unit. In addition, fellows would be encouraged to find time to take advantage of the excellent laboratory/ research facilities available at the institute.

Opportunities for career advancement

The planned and organized fellowship training for 2 years is expected to provide the trainee several advantages in career advancement:

1. Provide comprehensive training in the clinical aspects of modern pediatric hematologyoncology in the setting of an organized and evidence-based practice. This aims to enable the candidate to be adept in both independent functioning, and as a participant in shared care models, at the end of his/her fellowship.
2. Opportunities for academic learning through regular departmental seminars, journal clubs and teaching series. Attendance in CME, conferences and symposia will be encouraged.
3. One or more research projects for each fellow will provide them an opportunity to gain experience in clinical research and publishing.
4. Opportunity to interact with the dedicated translational research unit.

Evaluation

The fellows will be expected to have a pre-rotation meeting with the faculty, wherein goals and expectations will be clearly discussed, and he/she would be required to appraise his/her performance at the end of each semester. In addition, performance in teaching sessions, audits and impromptu discussions will form the basis of evaluation. This will be complemented by an exit examination under the **IAP fellowship program in Pediatric hematology-oncology**, at the end of 2 years.

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