

Medical experts trying to level the cost of care

By Ketaki Gokhale, Bloomberg

Devi Shetty is obsessed with making heart surgery affordable for millions of Indians. On his office desk are photographs of two of his heroes: Mother Teresa and Mahatma Gandhi.

Shetty is not a public health official motivated by charity. He's a heart surgeon turned businessman who has started a chain of 21 medical centers around India. By trimming costs with such measures as buying cheaper scrubs and spurning air-conditioning, he has cut the price of artery-clearing coronary bypass surgery to 95,000 rupees (\$1,583), half of what it was 20 years ago, and wants to get the price down to \$800 within a decade. The same procedure costs \$106,385 at Ohio's Cleveland Clinic, according to data from the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

"It shows that costs can be substantially contained," said Srinath Reddy, president of the Geneva-based World Heart Federation, of Shetty's approach. "It's possible to deliver very high quality cardiac care at a relatively low cost."

Medical experts like Reddy are watching closely, eager to see if Shetty's driven cost-cutting can point the way for hospitals to boost revenue on a wider scale by making life-saving heart operations more accessible to potentially millions of people in India and other developing countries.

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