

2nd of its kind in the world, a patients' account of a serious eye disease

*Dr Debraj Shome blames excessive use of antibiotics for modern day bacteria turning immune to the strongest medication*

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Mumbai, May 2: Little did 25-year-old software engineer Rajesh Sawant know that a seemingly insignificant boil on his lower eyelid would cost him his vision. In just two days Rajesh had lost his sight in the left eye completely. The eye had turned red and there was a discharge and severe swelling of the lids. It had also been paining constantly.

It was only when he went to Dr Debraj Shome, head of ophthalmic and facial plastic surgery department, Aditya Jyot Eye Hospital that he discovered that he was suffering from necrotising fasciitis, an acute condition where an organism enters the skin and affects the underlying, subcutaneous tissues. Sawant's case is the second such case to be reported in the world, said Dr Shome.

"As necrotising fasciitis is a life threatening disorder, we removed the dead tissue immediately while the live tissue was cleaned with betadine solution. The patient was then admitted and was started on broad-spectrum intra-venous antibiotics." But, all was not well for Sawant who did not respond to antibiotics for 48 hours. At this stage, the doctors suspected a multi-drug resistant bug. "I wanted the pain to subside as soon as possible because I didn't want to stay away from work for long," he says.

The microbiology report confirmed the doctors' fears. It was a strain of Community Acquired Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (CAMRSA), which means that the bacteria was resistant even to the latest and strongest antibiotics. "We first tried augmentin, the strongest drug possible. But the bacteria showed resistance to it. Based on the culture sensitivity report, which assesses the effect of certain drugs on the organism, we tried vancomycin, a relatively older but highly toxic drug," added Dr Shome.

Sawant recovered rapidly thereafter and in a week, had regained normal vision in his eye. He was discharged about a week ago. "I am extremely grateful to Dr Debraj Shome who has saved me from certain blindness and even death. I have learnt my lesson. I will never neglect even the smallest boil on the face again," says Sawant, whose life is back to normal now.

Dr Shome blames the unhindered use of antibiotics for an increase in the number of multi drug resistance cases. "Patients and doctors want a cure as soon as possible. This leads to more and more new antibiotics being used even for small ailments," said Shome. He stressed on the need for more awareness among consumers and healthcare professionals, "Patients need to understand that certain illnesses take time to cure and hence, they must allow the drug to complete its full course or else, more and more bugs will get resistant. For instance, a drug like ciplox killed almost every bacteria, but that was five years ago. Today, not many doctors use it as bacteria is resistant to that as well."

This case, due to the rarity of the offending organism and the success of the therapy employed, has been accepted for publishing in the critically acclaimed American Journal of Ophthalmology.