

BANGALORE MATTERS

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SPEEDING to somewhere. Suddenly....Craaaashhhhh! Imagine if you were cruising happily along a segregated highway on an arterial road in Bangalore. Imagine if you were knocked down by a truck rumbling along on the wrong side of the road.

I know of two cases that played out like that scenario. The ones who died were very dear friends.

Bangalore has the dubious distinction of being among the country's worst in terms of traffic accidents and road deaths.

Pedestrians, two-wheeler riders and truck drivers seem to die more often than others. Readers of this paper may feel safe in their sedans and SUVs. Yet, think of the people you know who have been injured in a road accident in the past ten years. It is bound to add up to quite a list.

Dr. Venkataramana not only made up such a list, which included dozens of patients who came into his neurosurgery clinic, he began to wonder what were the simple solutions that could be initiated to alleviate the situation.

What can I do, is what he asked himself.

The result?

The Comprehensive Trauma Consortium (CTC)

"For 20 years, I watched accident victims come to my table. We kept making plans for solutions, we had lots of meetings but no concrete steps emerged.

"Everywhere else, they have such a perfect rescue systems. It led me to ask... Why do we not respect life, here in India?"

The troubled doctor finally found a way out. Five years ago, he helped set up the CTC - the Comprehensive Trauma

Consortium, an idea way ahead of its time, that would involve government, private donors and hospitals across the city in an integrated effort to save lives in the critical golden hour between an accident and a hospital treatment.

The CTC provides ambulance and first aid services free across the city, and enables you to get immediate treatment "now, pay later" at its partner locations.

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said Venkataramana. "Still, thanks to Manipal Hospital and others, we have

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Innocent victims of road rage.

Photo:KPN

created one number 1062, that should serve as an access number for all people right here, at least."

1062 has received thousands of calls since it was opened up, has conducted 10,000 rescues and has saved hundreds of lives. "We are very excited about the results", said Venkataramana. "People are reacting in time for the golden hour." The golden hour is that precious hour between the time you have your accident and you are taken to a qualified care centre, without which your chances as a victim are pretty bleak.

Why are road statistics in our country so grim? Could it have anything to do with our own behaviour? Our penchant to 'horn' our way through trouble? Our desire to smash through intersections 'first'? Our ability to run past red lights unheeded?

The answer must come from within. That is our sum total of received wisdom.

When I asked the good doctor how much all this work affected his practice as a neurosurgeon, he sighed audibly and said, "Yes, to sustain this programme, I have spent a lot of time over the past five years. I wish it would become self sustainable soon."

Dr Venkataramana, with the CTC, is, like the others I have extolled in my column, part of the city's backbone. People like that need widespread support. Wherever I have asked, I have found that giving such support has in itself been a transformative citizen experience.

So what is stopping you?

Rohini Nilekani is Chairperson, Akshara Foundation