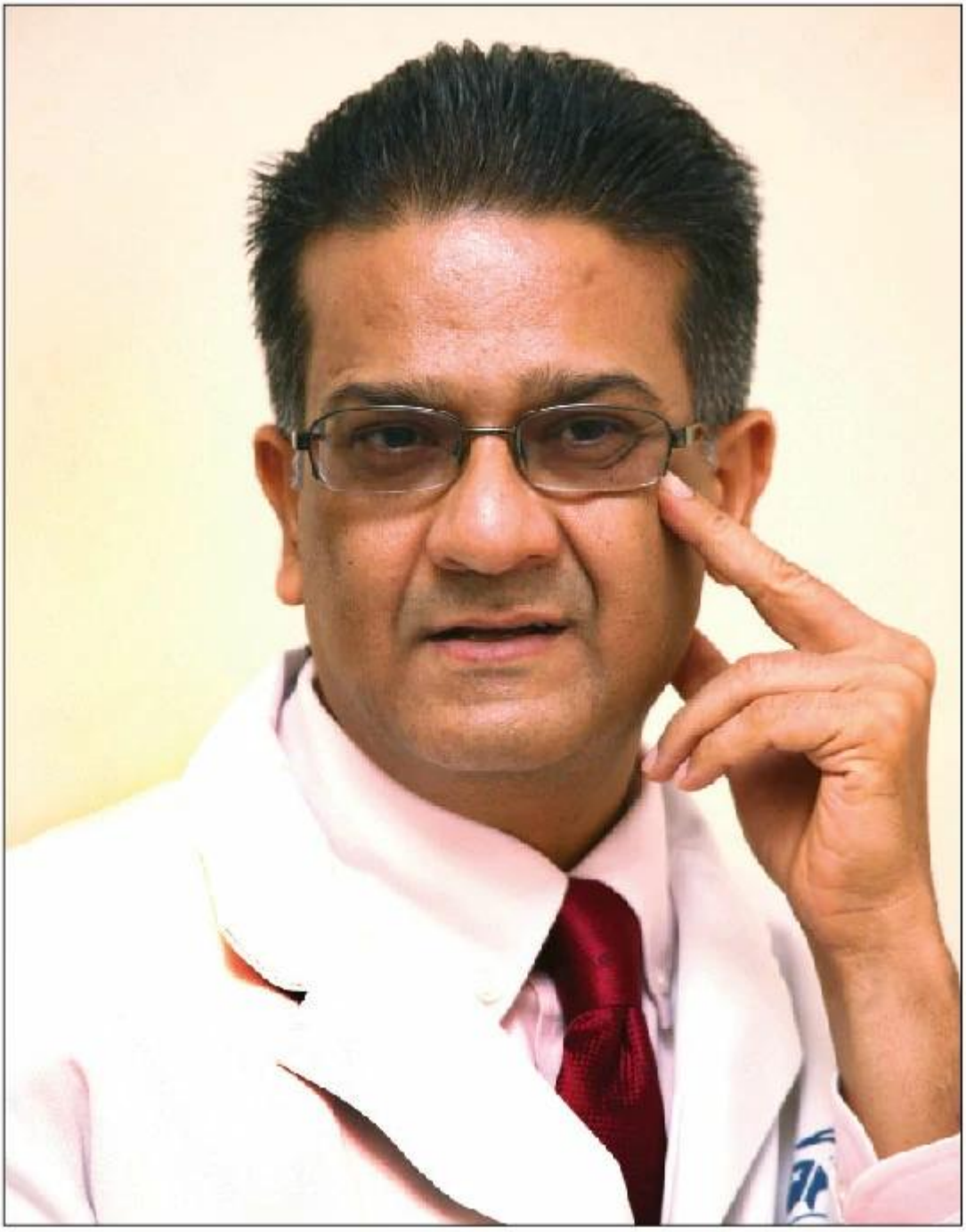


BREAKTHROUGH INNOVATION FOR HEARING AT APOLLO HOSPITAL



By Prasadini Nanayakkara | Photography by Menaka Aravinda

The first ever Bone Anchored Hearing Aid solution (BAHA) surgery in a private

hospital was performed at the Apollo Hospital, Colombo recently, the success of which was completed with the switching on of the device forever transforming the lives of its recipients. The two brothers who had their hearing im-paired due to malformed outer ear and canal were introduced to the world of sound with the innovation of the BAHA system from Cochlear-Australia. Dr Davanand Jha who first set up the ENT department at Apollo Hospitals spearheaded this procedure. Dr Jha studied and thereafter worked in the faculty at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, the foremost government medical institute in India, specialising in the area of ENT prior to working in Apollo Hospital, Colombo since its inception in 2002.

Unlike other hearing devices that use the ear canal, eardrum and transmits sound through air con-duction the BAHA system reroutes the signal directly through the skull bone to the inner ear. This by passes both the outer and middle ear and patients are able to hear once the sound processor is at-tached. Thereby the ideal candidates for the BAHA from Cochlear- Australia are those who have mal-formed ears where the outer ear and canal are not formed properly. Where other hearing aids fall short in transmitting sound efficiently, the BAHA System provides the ideal solution, returning hearing to normalcy, permanently. “Now the criteria of candidates for this procedure have increased, for instance people who have problems using conventional hearing solutions, either due to chronic ear discharge, where the conventional hearing aid keeps getting soiled and the quality of which also disintegrates over time and in cases where there are large cavities, the hearing aid really doesn’t help much. There is also single sided deafness that has been added to the list of indications, for which this is an ideal solution and doesn’t require an age limit,” says Dr Jha.

The surgery is of two stages for children below 12 years of age as were the cases conducted in Lady Ridgeway Hospital by Dr A D K S N Yasawardena and single stage surgery for those above twelve years. The surgery involves placing a titanium screw in the skull after which a period of four months should follow with follow up visits to take care of the healing process. Thereafter the switching-on of the sound processor is done. Dr Jha recalls the first time this was switched on at the Apollo Hospitals Colombo, “the two brothers started talking and questioning each other, forgetting their surroundings. We were enjoying it; it was a very satisfying feeling and happiness for us.”

Mihira Wickramarachchi CEO of Wickramarachchi Institute of Speech & Hearing that provides ENT, technical and audiology support, pioneering the Cochlear and BAHA implant system in Sri Lanka, offers this technology at one of the most affordable rates in the world. The device provided at Apollo Hospital is manufactured in Sweden and is supported by Cochlear-Australia and their partners in Sri Lanka, J M Wickramarachchi. Although it is only now that the BAHA system is introduced and the procedure successfully performed in Sri Lanka in Apollo Hospital and Lady Ridgeway Hospital, it has been in use in the western world for a long period. Mihira Wickramarachchi says, “I am happy to see these surgeries successfully completed in Sri Lanka on par with the international standards. The successful outcome of the Cochlear and the BAHA programme has earned international recognition and anyone can come to Sri Lanka for these surgeries. This will be instrumental in improving medical tourism here as these surgeries are very costly in other countries and involves waiting periods.”

A lifelong solution to hearing impairment, the procedure poses hardly any complications, as it re-quires minimal surgery. The external device which is easy to use and maintain, can be removed when the need arises and plugged back on by one’s self. The device enables the wearer to use other appa-ratuses such as ipods, FM receivers, tele coils and MP3 players without difficulty unlike other devices like the spectacle model bone conduction. The BAHA system and procedure now finally offered at the Apollo Hospitals Colombo and conducted by Dr Jha and supported by J M Wickramarachchi, allows a much-needed solution to those in need of this technology to be available and accessible in Sri Lanka.