

Published Date:	Thursday 13th May, 2021	Publication:	The Hindu [Chennai]
Journalist:	Bureau	Page No:	1
MAV/CCM:	3,183,000/254.64	Circulation:	466,149

With hospitals staggering under rising COVID-19 caseloads, hotels are acting as step-down care centres, providing additional beds, monitoring doctors and nurses on call

■ SWETA AKUNDI AND GOWRI S

As far as birthday celebrations go, this one at Sarovar Hotels and Resorts, Gurugram was unusual. A sexagenarian guest lay isolated in her hotel bedroom, as support staff in PPE suits walked in with a cake and a song.

The 60-bed property is now a care centre for elderly COVID-19 patients with mild or no symptoms. The hotel houses five ambulances in the premises and has a dedicated team of 20 medical professionals. Relatives can monitor the patient's vitals on a daily basis through Sarovar's app.

In the second wave of COVID-19 with increasing caseloads, hospitals are collaborating with hotels, both luxury and budget, to provide additional beds and medical care for mild and asymptomatic patients.

"Healthcare systems get crippled under the large volume of people approaching hospitals," says Tejasvi Rao, Chief Operations Officer at Apollo Hospitals, adding that many have mild symptoms and may not need hospitalisation. Now, patients are screened by the hospital and only if deemed fit to be admitted in a care centre, are they encouraged to avail these services. By partnering with hotels, he says, "We can reserve admits for those that require acute care, while also helping others that need supervision."

Apollo has a tie-up with Lemon Tree hotels and IHCL Group, which, in Chennai, includes the Taj Club House at the luxury end and Ginger Hotels at the economic end. It is a continuation of Apollo's Stay I project started in March 2020 by partnering with OYO hotels. This time around, it has partnered with 24 facilities across 11 cities, including Chennai, Bengaluru, Mumbai and Guwahati. Apart from reducing the burden on the health care system, such services also support the hospitality industry and its employees.

"The hotels provide hospitality services (including protein-heavy regional meals, thrice a day) and have been trained on the hygiene and cleaning protocol developed by a team of infectious disease doctors at Apollo," adds Tejasvi. The medical supervision is done by the partnering hospital. "We have a tech platform that enables teleconsultation

# Isolate, with room service



with doctors, and once the prescription is generated, our pharmacy and diagnostic teams make sure it is delivered."

Apart from this, nurses (one for every 20 beds) and ward boys are stationed at the hotel 24/7, along with a doctor to come in and check on the patient every day. In select hotels, oxygen cylinders and concentrators are kept on standby in case the situation deteriorates, and the patient needs to be moved to the partner hospital.

#### But why not home isolation?

Explaining why people may not be confident about home quarantine, Dr P Kuganathan, HOD, Infectious Diseases and Social Medicine, SIMS Hospital in Chennai,

says, "Some COVID-positive patients who are isolating at home due to the lack of beds land up in complications by the seventh or 12th day because they are not able to monitor their CRP (a marker of inflammation in the blood). Early intervention on the third or fourth day, under medical supervision, reduces any chances of such complications."

This is where isolating at a hotel-turned-COVID care centre comes into play. With doctors, nurses and ambulances on call 24/7, daily checkups and blood tests, a sudden deterioration can be detected and treated immediately.

Equally pressing is the concern for your immediate family. With joint families under one roof, and most of the younger lot still unvaccinated, people diagnosed with COVID-19 are afraid that they will pass on the infection to the ones taking care of them. It is what drove Rajeev Arora (name changed on request) to be put up at The Pride Hotel in Kilpauk, Chennai, for the past week.

"The doctor at VS Hospitals suggested I quarantine myself at home, but I was worried for the safety of my family. I have my mother, granddaughter, son and daughter-in-law living with me," he says.

Dr Aswin Sayiram SJ, COO, SIMS Hospital adds, "Most of them get anxious while at home and then fall sick. Now, even more so, we need such alternatives to work. It reduces the stress on the pa-



An extended arm (Clockwise from above) The support staff at Ramada Plaza by Wyndham, Guindy; a room meant for isolation at Sarovar Hotels, Gurugram

• GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK/AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

tient and the progression of the disease to a great extent."

This is all the more true for elderly people living away from their families, as Sarovar Hotels in Gurugram discovered. Apart from COVID-positive patients, those who are discharged from the hospital but have no one to take care of them are also welcome, says Ajay Bakaya, managing director of Sarovar Hotels and Resorts. The hotel, which has a tie-up with Fortis Memorial Research Institute, is equipped with ventilators, oxygen concentrators and cylinders and beds in case of emergencies, adds Ajay. "While the hospitals are filled to the brim in capacity, it is understandable that they can't spare their medical professionals. In our case, Emoha Elder Care is the institution that brought in the medical support," he says. While isolating, it is also important to have a physical presence next to one if need be. Which is why, the support staff is encouraged to enter the room, clean up, serve food and "hold their hands, if necessary".

**With doctors, nurses and ambulances on call 24/7, daily checkups and blood tests, a sudden deterioration can be detected and treated immediately**

#### Care within reach

Such 'courtesy calls' are the norm at ITC's Welcomhotel too that have partnered with Manipal Hospital in Delhi, and with G Kuppuswamy Naidu Memorial Hospital and KG Hospital in Coimbatore.

"The hospitals send the patients to our hotel, and the guest is guided to their room where they stay for the entire duration. Everything is online and contactless," says Erine Louis, general manager, Welcomhotel Coimbatore. "Doctors and nurses are stationed on the same floor, along with emergency oxygen, so that everything is within reach."

In a similar way, Ramada Plaza by Wyndham in Guindy now calls itself an extended arm of SIMS hospital. Last year, the hotel was serving doctors who had

blown in from across the country to treat patients. But this year, they wished to play a larger part by partnering with the hospital. Keeping in mind the importance of fresh air and sunshine, the hotel opens up its rooftops in the morning and evenings for a quick, supervised stroll. Patients can carry out breathing exercises, light stretches and yoga. "We also have comforting teams, who are solely meant to comfort patients by talking to them and understanding their needs," adds Sandeep Bhatnagar, general manager. Patients' food preferences are catered to, by working with a menu developed by hospital dietitians, adds Sandeep.

"We give them boiled amla, kabasura kudineer and sundal, as dietary supplements." To make sure there is unobstructed air flow, windows in corridors are left open in addition to having fresh air units with viral filters through the day.

The price for these services can start from ₹3,000 a night for single occupancy and go upto ₹10,000 a night for double occupancy (excluding lab tests and medicines). However, if you have been advised to stay at a hotel with COVID-19 care facilities, as part of your treatment by a medical practitioner, you can claim insurance against the treatment cost. This was made clear last year after the Insurance Regulatory Development Authority of India issued a notification recognising 'makeshift' and 'temporary' hospitals.

This is why, says Rajeev, he can afford his seven-day stay. "I had to spend a lakh to save my family from myself," he says. "I know how difficult it is to enter a hospital right now, at least this way there is space for those who need it more. Picking a hotel to stay was definitely the right call. If I went home and somebody got sick in the next two days, I would feel really guilty. It feels safer this way."

