

Rehab Mela is an annual get-together in Vellore of persons with Spinal Cord Injury. The event is a forum for a reunion of alumni of Mary Verghese Institute of Rehabilitation, a part of Christian Medical College Vellore.

The Rehab Mela is a three-day event that has always been held on the third Friday, Saturday and Sunday of February every year. The Rehab Mela is held at the Mary Verghese Trust for Physically Handicapped.

Dr Mary Verghese, the pioneer of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation in India and also the founder of what is today a world-class Rehabilitation Centre in Bagayam, Vellore, set up these organizations.

Dr Mary Verghese was a paraplegic, yet a great surgeon from the wheelchair.

In a pioneering move, the concept of a Rehab Mela was initiated in the early nineties by the team at the Mary Verghese Institute of Rehabilitation.

The Rehab Mela provides an opportunity for persons with spinal cord injury and their care-givers to gather, interact and share their experiences, get quality medical checkup, discuss relevant socio-economic issues and showcase their talents.

The first Rehab Mela was held in 1994.

The first Rehab Mela had participation of 45 alumni. The event has become increasingly popular and in 2011, 182 persons attended the Rehab Mela. Including the presence of care-givers, about 400 persons gathered.

The Rehab Mela focuses on alumni who live in a 100-kilometre radius of Vellore, though the Mary Verghese Institute of Rehabilitation is always a mini-India based on places from where people come to get care.

On the first day, the alumni are given a comprehensive medical check up including blood tests, ultrasound of



kidney and bladder and other diagnostic services, at the Mary Verghese Institute of Rehabilitation.

They also get an opportunity to have their day-to-day practices reviewed and revised by experienced occupational and physio therapists. It is also an occasion to interact with psychologists and social workers.

Alumni are given the facility to get their equipment such as callipers, walkers, crutches, wheelchairs and tri-cycles checked and repaired. They also get an opportunity to buy necessary medicines and equipment.

Based on the medical assessment, the doctors meet each alumnus and his/her family on the third day and provide feedback. This service is provided free of cost and helps in the health upkeep of the alumni.

The program over the three days is outlined in the accompanying shaded box titled Snapshot on Activity.

For the three days, alumni stay in the Mary Verghese Trust and in a unique experience, use sand beds, which have been effective in ensuring skin safety.

They get an opportunity to be in an environment that gives them a window to real-world situations.

All the participants share the same place, food and environment.

Apart from these aspects, the Rehab Mela has helped create bonds, renew friendship and ensure constant linkages in the rest of the year.

The event has also brought to the fore community leaders who play a major role in networking with alumni in their respective areas.

The Rehab Mela has also helped several alumni discover more independent ways of managing themselves. Quite a few of them play an increasingly active role in the organization of the Rehab Mela.

Snapshot on Activity

- Medical follow-up
- Review with therapists & social workers
- Sporting events
- Drawing, Painting and Rangoli competition
- Indoor games
- Guidance on government programs
- Discussion on socio-economic issues
- Talent night to showcase skills of alumni
- Cultural programs by, patients under going care at Rehab, staff, alumni and students
- Spiritual discourse and discussion
- An update on medical practices
- Fitness program
- Experience sharing among alumni
- Counselling
- Special clinics to discuss aspects such as marriage and adoption
- Interaction with guests of honour
- Feedback from Social Workers
- Community leadership programs
- Interaction with inpatients in Rehab
- Release of Rehab Murasu, a publication dedicated to SCI persons
- Prize distribution across events on all days



A comment from a regular participant underscores the importance of the event:

‘for Hindus-Diwali; for Christians – Christmas; for Muslims-Ramzan but for us “Rehab Mela’.

The Rehab Mela has been a successful role model for similar events in various locations. Such events regularly take place now in Ambur, Tiruvannamalai, Vellore and Arni.

New such initiatives have been undertaken in Chennai and Coimbatore also. In Vellore, the Rehab Mela for SCI persons has also been extended to a Mela for Brain Injured Persons; this is held on the second Saturday of February.

Other organisations such as Amar Seva Sangam in Ayikudy, Tamil Nadu and Nina Foundation, Mumbai have also embraced the concept of an annual get-together of persons with spinal cord injury.

Efforts over the years at the Rehab Mela have also been instrumental in the formation of Spinal Care India – A Vibrant Life, an aspiring Pan-India organization for persons with spinal cord injury.

The Rehab Mela is an event that has become an integral part of the calendar and is looked forward to by not just alumni and their family, but also by the doctors, therapists, social workers and nursing staff.

Number of participants

