

# 22-year-old inflicts wounds on himself to seek med attention

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## MUNCHAUSEN'S SYNDROME

► A psychological disorder in which a person fakes illness or self-inflicts wounds to seek attention. Named after German aristocrat Baron Munchausen who was known for telling unbelievable tales about his exploits

**Some known causes |**  
Emotional trauma during

childhood, personality disorder

**Treatment |** Psychiatric and psychological therapy



One of Argha's paintings

**Kolkata:** A 22-year-old who had sustained a fracture in his right hand, had been doing the rounds of several hospitals, for more than three years for bleeding from the surgical site after each surgery. His treatment had involved orthopaedic surgeons, haematologists and plastic surgeons before doctors finally identified the problem — a rare psychological disorder called Munchausen's syndrome, in which a person inflicts wounds on himself or herself to seek attention.

Argha (name changed) of Howrah had fractured his right hand sometime in mid-2016 and underwent a surgery in a nursing home in Howrah Maidan. The plate was removed in June 2018. But within a few days, he started complaining of bleeding from the surgical site. He was taken back to the doctor who conducted another surgery. For the next four months, his hand was bandaged. However, within weeks of removal of the bandage, another wound deve-

loped at the same spot. This time, he was given antibiotics. But once the course was complete, he complained of bleeding again. This time, the doctor asked Argha's parents to take him to another physician.

An a private hospital, an orthopaedic surgeon treated Argha for infection. But once back home, he started complaining of pain and bleeding. This doctor then asked Argha's parents to take him to a haematologist. They went to another hospital where doctors found no infection and were unable to gauge why the wound had appeared. "We then

came to Narayana Superspecialty Hospital, Howrah, to consult a haematologist. He found nothing wrong and directed me to the plastic surgery department," Argha told TOI.

By this time, the family had run out of funds. The hospital's guest support executive, Bhaswati Ambule, got philanthropist Anuradha Agarwal on board to sponsor Argha's treatment. Plastic surgeons Adhish Basu and Cinjini Das found that due to the repeated wounds, the patient had developed an ulcer and deformity in his fingers. After ruling out cancer, the team remo-

ved the ulcer and released contracture in his tendons in November 2019. Argha was then sent home. But he soon returned with the same complaint. "That was when we decided to consult psychiatrist S Bhakta and psychologist Indrani Dutta because we suspected the wound was self-inflicted," said Basu.

During intensive counselling and psychotherapy sessions, Argha, a good singer and a talented painter who had dropped out of an animation course, admitted he had inflicted the wound himself. Munchausen syndrome is a psychological disorder in which a patient fakes illness or deliberately produces symptoms of illness like self-inflicted wounds to prove that he/she is ill with the intention of attention.

It has been two months since the last surgery and medication and counselling have ensured Argha's wounds did not return. The hospital is also planning to exhibit his paintings. "I am now looking forward to people who will engage me in creative work," said Argha.