

# Stories of celebrity patients

Leela Chacko, deputy chief of nursing at Lilavati, has attended to many famous people and some infamous ones too. From the *late Saddam Hussein* to the *Dalai Lama*, there are many tales to tell. But Chacko refuses to get starry-eyed



Sr Leela Chacko with her team at Lilavati Hospital

By ALISHA COELHO  
alisha.coelho@mid-day.com

IF the walls of Lilavati Hospital could talk, they would tell stories of celebrity patients.

Hospital staff, however, remains unaffected by their starry trysts, working under a lady who has seen it all.

Deputy Chief of Nursing may seem an imposing title, but Leela Chacko seems more like a benevolent aunt who maintains a firm hand on the nurses under her charge. Autographs or saying hello to high-profile patients is a strict no-no. "Thankfully, I haven't had to shoo away any of my nurses from a hospital suite for acting starry-eyed," she laughs.

Chacko has been at Lilavati Hospital since 1997 and manages over 500 nurses who man Lilavati's halls. Her career, which began in 1975, has taken her to three countries and introduced her to a wide variety of people. After completing training from Nair Hospital, she went on to work in Saudi Arabia and Iraq, a stint which brought her into contact with the late Saddam Hussein.

"His niece needed treatment and he insisted that I was part of the treatment team. He couldn't say my name right, so all I heard him say, was 'I want Layla.'" Though Saddam's niece passed away, Chacko's efforts were recognised; she received a gold ring from

the palace for her efforts.

Returning to Mumbai, Chacko worked briefly with Bombay Hospital before joining Lilavati. Her work has won her compliments from the likes of Abhishek Bachchan and John Abraham. The latter is said to have compared her and her staff to stars in the sky.

But it's not always about celebrity trappings. She recalls the instance of a 24-year-old professor who met with a bike accident. "When he was brought in, his chances looked slim and family had no hope. I urged them to pray and keep faith in the doctors treating him. He finally got better and left in three months. His mother and sister still call to thank me for the support."



As a nurse at Nair Hospital

## Chacko's patient list

- Amitabh Bachchan
- Teji Bachchan (late)
- Raveena Tandon
- Suzanne Hrithik Roshan
- Dalai Lama
- Bal Thackeray
- John Abraham