GENTLY INTO DAYLIGHT

The psychiatrists, Bharat and Smitha Vatwani, went over the derelict sprawled under the pitiless sun in the asphyxiating street. “Come with us,” they said.

They gave him food, a wash, a change of clothes, a bed in their clinic and a new lease of life. A restoration of dignity to Vijayam, 25.

“Come with us.” These three words have transformed the lives of 13 homeless, mentally afflicted persons in the past year, pulled back acute psychotics from the depths of their miseries.

Why do Smitha and Bharat Vatwani do it? Merely the uncoiling of an urge to reach out to the patients and help those too sick to ask for help.

“The wandering insane have a right to treatment, as much as others,” said Smitha, and we try to give them the best therapy possible. Patient consent is not necessary, for he is clearly harming “self” or “others.”

For instance, Vijayam was found near a gutter, subsisting on garbage. His recovery was fast, and a month’s treatment later, he dregged out his identity and address— to which he was speedily restored.

“It was like a dream when I received a telegram from a faraway, unknown place, that my son was safe and well,” his father, a zilla parishad superintendent in Andhra Pradesh, confided. For over two years, he had been losing his memory and becoming confused. “Otherwise we would have been saddled with recovered patients who have nowhere to go. In one instance, an elderly man was cured, but did not wish to return to his family. At a loss, they almost confined him to the ‘van’.”

However, 56-year-old Pillai was an older man helped and rehabilitated by the Vatwani. He was using a walking stick and his brain was active, ability to communicate had returned.

The Vatwans help the mentally insane off the streets

The chemist supplies free drugs, the staff helps with the patients, the police look after their sources.

A CID officer of Purulia, West Bengal, helped the Vatwans find the address of Bimal Kumar Acharya, 26. Having run away from home nine years ago after failing the 10th standard, the return of Bimal was like the redemption of a forgotten promise for his incredulous parents.

Often they get little by way of financial compensation from relatives, but they say that they can afford one free bed for every seven patients who pay for their treatment.

Quietly efficient, unassuming, they are cut out for the samaritan role, the couple seems an anachronism in today’s corporate-doctor age. Their sprawling clinic takes on a new dimension.

For Smitha and Bharat Vatwani, they are not merely skilled doctors, they are practitioners in the forgotten art of healing.