

## *Rakesh Sundaram*



Rakesh Sundaram is 30 years old, and a second-year PhD student of Applied Physics at the University of Michigan. Before joining the program, Rakesh worked as a Research Assistant at the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore, India. The demands of grad school don't leave him with much free time, but he spends whatever little he has with his wife Saroja and their two-year-old daughter Maya. They usually spend Sundays cooking a traditional Indian lunch, and making phone calls to their relatives back home in India. He spends a lot of time on the internet, looking for articles pertaining to his research, and communicating with colleagues and researchers via email. "I'd say I've become adept at navigating bad interfaces," he smiles, genially, "I usually manage to find what I'm looking for online". He also uses the internet to further his hobby – listening to Carnatic music, a form of classical Indian music. "I'm frequently on eBay and Amazon, looking for some good CDs."

Rakesh was dealt a severe blow last year, when his 26-year-old brother Shyam was involved in a car accident in Bangalore. "He was in a coma for three days...we were so grief-stricken...then he regained consciousness, but he had suffered an injury to the spinal cord and is paralyzed from the waist down". Rakesh now makes time to find out what he can about spinal cord injuries and paralysis – "anything that can help my brother," he says.

## *Scenario: Rakesh Sundaram*

Sunday morning, shopping for groceries at Kroger with Saroja, Rakesh runs into Shreedhar, a friend with whom he had taken a class during his first year as a PhD student. They chat briefly about what they've been doing since then, and Shreedhar mentions a clinical research experiment that he participated in as a volunteer. Rakesh is interested, and when he gets home, 'googles' the name of the organization that Shreedhar had mentioned – Engage.

He finds the Engage website, and scans the homepage. "Too text-heavy," he says to himself, but clicks around rapidly, glancing at the 'About Research' page, and skimming through 'Questions and Answers'. Always on the lookout for information pertaining to spinal cord damage and paralysis, Rakesh visits the 'Find Studies' section of the website, and clicks 'Start my Search'. Momentarily annoyed by the form asking for details of whether he has visited the site before or not, Rakesh moves on and decides to 'Search by Keyword'. He enters 'spinal cord damage', but that returns no results. Aware of the stringent matching mechanisms used by some search engines, Rakesh broadens the search to just 'spinal cord'.

He glances at the short list of results and promptly clicks 'spinal cord injuries'. Two studies are listed under that category, and skimming the short descriptions of both, Rakesh decides that only the first of the two relate to his brother Shyam's case. He clicks on the study to learn more, and reads the slightly more detailed description provided. Under 'eligibility', he finds that the study is seeking people with the condition as well as healthy volunteers.

Rakesh decides instantaneously to register, and clicks on the 'Volunteer for Research' tab. He selects the university login link, wondering absentmindedly why the link wasn't more directly accessible. He clicks through the four pages of the consent form, and rapidly enters the five pages of personal information that he is asked for. He is used to entering information online when he uses Amazon or eBay, so the process of online registration via Engage doesn't worry him. Besides, the fact that the site is part of the University of Michigan reassures him that his information will be secure enough.

Rakesh receives a confirmation that his enrollment has been completed. He had elected to notify the research team directly, instead of being notified by them, so he returns to the page of the study by searching for it again, notes the email address of the contact person and starts to compose an email introducing himself and his interest in participating.