After successful heart, kidney, liver transplants, the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGMIER) is now eyeing to perform hand transplant surgery. The institute's plastic surgery department has initiated the groundwork for the same and if all goes well, the transplant will be a reality in the next six to seven months.

In India, Kochi-based Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences (AIMS) was first to perform successful hand transplant surgery in January last year. To date, only two bilateral hand transplant surgeries have been performed in the country and both of these were done by the team headed by Dr Subramania Iyer at AIMS. If all goes as per plan, then PGI will be the country’s second institute to perform hand transplant surgery.

On Thursday, Dr Subramania Iyer delivered a special talk at PGI and discussed his experience of performing the first bilateral hand transplant in India. “The beginning has been made. If they (Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences in Kochi, Kerala) can do it, why not PGI?” said head of the plastic surgery department, PGI, Dr Ramesh Sharma.

“The department is going to send its doctors for four to six week-long training to AIMS. After which, we will seek approval from the state government for conducting the surgery. Physiotherapists will be trained and general public will be made aware about it. The entire procedure will take six to seven month’s time,” he said.
He added that it is not easy to start new programmes as a lot of groundwork is required, but we have decided to go ahead with it. The doctor informed that performing the hand transplant surgery is more challenging as compared to kidney or liver transplantation, wherein only blood vessels need to be sutured together to restore circulation.

“In hand transplant, apart from these two, you also have to re-establish the continuity of the bones, suture each tendon and muscle; and various nerves both motor and sensory. All these have to be sutured,” said Dr Ramesh. He said the technique is more demanding and needs double efforts.

Post hand transplant surgery, the recipient will have to undergo physiotherapy treatment for six to 12 months. The therapy is required to train nerves, muscles tendons of the hand to refuction.