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Stem cell bank to be ready by March-end

Special Correspondent

It will collect 40,000 units of umbilical cord blood

CHENNAI: Tamil Nadu's first public stem cell bank to collect, test, preserve and make available stem cells for recipients, who require transplantation, will become operational here by March-end.

A venture of Jeevan Blood Bank, a not-for-profit community bank, it will collect not less than 40,000 units of stem cells gathered from umbilical cord blood in five years. Seventy per cent of its capacity will be for public storage, which will be subsidised by the remaining 30 per cent to be used for private banking, according to P. Srinivasan, chairman and managing director, Jeevan Blood Bank and Research Centre.

How it works

Explaining the process of collection and storage, Saranya Nandakumar, medical director, Jeevan Blood Bank and Research Centre, said cord blood was derived from the umbilical cord, discarded as waste. It contained stem cells capable of developing into any other cell type. According to studies, 93 per cent of patients with standard risk factors showed a three-year survival rate after cord blood transplantation.

Women willing to donate cord blood must register before delivery by filling up a health card. Healthy mothers with full-term pregnancies were eligible for stem cell donation. About 50-150 ml of cord blood must be collected five minutes after delivery. The ideal time would be just after the cord was clamped.

The women undergo counselling and agreement be reached with the hospital. A similar procedure would be followed in the case of private banking, but donors who stored cord blood for the needs of their family would have to pay a fee of Rs.70,000.

While units stored in a private bank could be used restrictively, cord blood in the public bank would be available for those in need of stem cell transplantation after HLA typing was done. When a match was detected, the required unit of frozen stem cells would be transported to the hospital where the transplantation was scheduled.

Dr. Srinivasan said the units would be provided free of cost to the poor, but Rs.1 lakh would be charged from others. The costs for the same units in Singapore could be as high as Rs.11 lakh. If the patient was being treated in another country, processing charge would also be levied. A small per cent of the stored units would be made available for research.

Bone marrow donor registry

Jeevan Stem Cell Bank would get ready a bone marrow donor registry within the next few weeks. It hoped to sign up with international registries and publish on a website the contents of a stem cell registry so that a matching unit could be identified by any hospital across India and the globe.

“We will collaborate with national research organisations approved by the Government of India,” Dr.Srinivasan said. There were also plans to start branches across the country.

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