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State-of-the-art voluntary blood bank for City

by Suresh Seshadri

MADRAS – Jeevan, a voluntary blood bank scheduled to open in the City in July, is set to usher in the highest international standards of quality assurance and safety in blood and blood products.

Run by the Lister Charitable Trust for Technology, Education and Research (LCCTER), the Rs. 70 lakh-blood bank will offer products (for the first time in the private blood bank sector) that include separated blood components such as fresh frozen plasma, platelets and red cells.

LCCTER managing trustee and director of the Lister Laboratory, Dr. P. Srinivasan, explaining the rationale behind the project, says, "the foremost objective is making available blood products screened for safety in accordance with the WHO and American Association of Blood Banks (AABB) standards."

While most city blood banks, including those attached to the bigger private hospitals currently carry out a routine mandatory screening of the donor's blood for the Hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) and the HIV antibody, a majority of them fail to check for the most common cause of transfusion induced jaundice, the Hepatitis C virus.

Also, the methods that all these blood banks presently use for the HIV screening are only capable of detecting HIV 6-16 weeks after an infection. So the diagnosis is missed if the infection is less than 6 weeks old.

To overcome this, the screening programme at the Jeevan blood bank will run the entire battery of AABB mandated screening tests. Important among them will be the Anti HCV test, to detect the Hepatitis C virus and the P24 (HIV Antigen) test which will help detect an HIV infection

from as early as 7-10 days. Another test will help screen for the all-pervasive Cytomegalovirus (a member of the herpes virus family that remains inactive for very long periods and mainly affects newborns and people with impaired immune systems). Other tests will screen for the malarial and microfilarial parasites and syphilis. "All these tests will be carried out using WHO and AABB approved methods," added microbiologist and LCCTER trustee Dr. Sharanya Narayanan.

Jeevan's consultant transfusion technologist, Mr. Sam Carr explains that the stocking of blood components at the blood bank would be in tune with the current global trends in blood banking and transfusion medicine. "Today's science acknowledges very few conditions where transfusion of 'whole blood' is

required. As far back as the early 70s, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), mandated that all blood banks should store 90 per cent of their blood only as components."

Components not only reduce the risk of transfusion related complications, such as induced haemodynamic imbalances (patients with third degree burns mainly need only plasma and giving them whole blood to compensate the fluid loss could even prove fatal) but also increase the utility of every unit of blood received from a donor by over 60 per cent. Components can also be stored for a longer period, with red blood cells having a shelf life of 10 years at -80C. This enables people to receive their own blood at a later date if required – an autologous transfusion.

Observing that the final blood products from Jeevan would initially need to be priced at around

Rs. 600 per unit of blood component (a unit of blood costs between Rs. 250 to Rs. 1,000 at other blood banks) Dr. Srinivasan adds that considering the number of screening tests carried out, the blood bank would actually end up bearing a subsidy of over Rs. 400 for every unit of blood collected. "We are banking on community support and participation in donating blood. Even if one lakh healthy adults in Madras donate blood twice a year, we are confident that we would be able to meet our goal of being a facility that can offer blood 'on demand' – you can walk away with your cross-matched requirement of blood in about two hours."

The first phase of the project is being entirely funded through donations from private individuals, corporates and medical equipment manufacturers.