

Global Network for Blood Donation, A Rotarian Action Group

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Rotarians in India move into the stem cell era

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The Rotary-supported Jeevan Blood Bank in Chennai has expanded on the voluntary blood donor concept into the era of the stem cell therapy and has opened the first public not-for-profit cord blood bank in India. The immediate focus will be to help children suffering from blood cancer and the blood disease thalassemia, according to Dr. P. Srinivasan, co-founder, Chairman and Managing Trustee - and a Rotarian himself.

The Jeevan Blood Bank and Research Centre in Chennai is run by an independent Board of Trustees (six out of nine being Rotarians including three Past Presidents) and the programmes are supported by, among others, the Rotary Clubs of [Madras East](#), [Madras Metro](#) and [Madras Northwest](#) in [District 3230](#).

The blood bank has been providing safe blood components to the community for the past 12 years. Jeevan is now venturing into the era of the [stem cell](#) therapy and has established India's first public cord blood bank in the not-for-profit sector.

The non-profit [Jeevan Blood Bank](#) has expanding on the voluntary blood donor concept on the heels of some of India's largest corporate players and regional newcomers looking for business opportunities and profits in the growing stem cell market.

For the Jeevan Stem Cell Bank (JSCB), the plan is to "collect, test, process and store not less than 40,000 units of stem cells from umbilical cord blood over the next five years," **Dr. P. Srinivasan**, co-founder, Chairman and Managing Trustee of the [Jeevan Blood Bank](#), told Indian media prior to the opening of the cell bank in April 2008.

70 percent of the blood cord bank's capacity will be for public storage and usage. **Dr. P. Srinivasan**, a Rotarian himself, told the media that the need for the stem cell service would be provided free of charge for the poor. The remaining 30 percent of capacity is privately paid storage which will help to support the processing cost of the Public Stem Cell Bank.

The non-profit stem cell bank may help in curing more than 70 medical conditions,

including blood cancers and other haematological conditions like the blood disease thalassemia, **Dr. P. Srinivasan**, told Indian media. However, the immediate focus will be helping children with blood cancer and the blood disease [thalassemias](#).

A small percent of the stored stem cells will be made available for research. **Dr. P. Srinivasan** emphasizes that the Jeevan Blood Bank and Research Centre has maintained a "delicate balance of serving a social cause and yet having the courage to invest in research activities".

Over the past years, the Jeevan Blood Bank has collected more than 70,000 units of blood from voluntary donors "with a clean medical history". At the same time, the blood bank has made available more than 122,000 units of safe blood and blood components to the community.

The Jeevan Blood Bank and Research Centre Charitable Trust - the full name of the trust - was inaugurated in September 1995 as a not-for-profit community blood bank. The name Jeevan means "life".

After eight years in service, the blood bank succeeded in breaking even economically.

According to an [Executive Summary](#) from the Jeevan Stem Cell Bank, every year about three million Indians are diagnosed with cancer, between five and ten percent of them with leukaemia, lymphoma and other types of haematological cancers. Approximately 10,000 children in the country are born every year with the inheritable blood disease thalassemia.

For many such patients, peripheral blood stem cell transplantation or umbilical cord derived stem cell transplantation offers the only hope.

Currently, however, India does not have a facility which could provide compatible umbilical cord derived stem cell or a peripheral stem cell donor registry.

Women willing to donate cord blood must register at the blood bank before delivery. Umbilical cord blood will be collected immediately after the delivery of the baby.

The laboratory will then harvest stem cells, test for transmissible infections, store and ultimately release safe compatible units to anyone who needs it, perhaps even a child whose mother donated her cord blood at the time of the delivery.

About 50-150 milliliters of cord blood will be collected within five minutes after delivery. A normal bleed for donation consists of circa 450 milliliters of blood, equal to about one tenth of the amount of blood in an adult body.

In India, the companies Reliance, Lifecell and Cryobank have emerged as leaders in stem cell banking. The first private stem cell bank in India was founded by the company Lifecell, also in Chennai.

The Jeevan Stem Cell Bank will work in association with various hospitals in the city and national research organizations approved by the Indian government. The new public cord blood bank will sign up with international agencies and publish the contents of a stem cell registry on a website so that matching unit could be identified by any hospital across India and the world.

Chennai, formerly known as Madras, is the capital of the southern Indian state Tamil Nadu. It is the fourth largest city in India with more than seven million people in the metropolitan area.

Note : Go the the journal PHOTOS to view pictures from the Jeevan Stem Cell Bank, the Jeevan Blood Bank and Research Centre.

Editor's note: Rotarian **Dr. P. Srinivasan** is member of Rotary Club of Madras East which has conducted several successful long term projects. He will be attending the Rotary International Convention in Los Angles in June, where he can be contacted via GNBD's exhibition booth in the House of Friendship. **"Srini"** can also be contacted by e-mail srinivasan@jeevan.org or by phone +91 9840083535. He is a charter member of Global Network for Blood Donation, a Rotarian Action Group.

Footnote : See also the article "[Rotary Blood Banks in India](#)" , Rotary News October 2007

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