

New hope for blood cancer patients to find a matching blood stem cell donor

29 May 2019 | News

DKMS joins forces with Bangalore Medical Service Trust (BMST)



This World Blood Cancer Day, DKMS - one of the largest international blood stem cell donor centers in the world joined forces with Bangalore Medical Service Trust (BMST), a centre of excellence in the areas of blood banking, transfusion and immunohematology in Bangalore. **DKMS BMST Foundation India** will provide access to a large pool of potential blood stem cell donors to provide patients suffering from blood cancer and other blood disorders such as Thalassemia or Aplastic Anaemia, both in India and worldwide, with a second chance at life.

Speaking of the challenge we face today, Dr Biju George MBBS, MD, DM, Professor & Head, Department of Haematology at CMC Vellore said, "Every 5 minutes someone in India is diagnosed with blood cancer and other blood disorders wherein Leukaemia, Lymphoma and Myeloma are the top 3 forms to be found. While blood cancer is life-threatening, a set of healthy blood stem cells from a matching donor can be life-saving". The registry DKMS-BMST at present has over 27,000 registered potential blood stem cell donors. This number will increase considerably over the years with the aim of finding a matching donor for every patient in need.

Highlighting the impact of the myths that exist in India, Dr Latha Jagannathan, Medical Director & Managing Trustee of BMST said, "Many patients suffering from blood cancer and other blood disorders need a blood stem cell transplant to survive. Unfortunately the majority of patients are never able to receive a transplant due to the unavailability of a matching blood stem cell donor. In India, only 0.03% of the total population is registered as a potential blood stem cell donor. This is significantly lower than many other countries including the US where 2.7% and Germany where 10% of the population is registered as a potential donor. A lack of understanding and multiple baseless misconceptions existing amongst people about the process, impacts the cause. It is high time that we all overcome this and commit to being a life saver to save our children".

A successful blood stem cell transplant needs a perfect HLA tissue match. Patients and donors of Indian origin have unique HLA characteristics that are severely under-represented in the global database, which makes the probability of finding a suitable donor even more difficult. 70 percent of patients do not find a matching donor within their family and instead rely on finding an unrelated donor in the global database. "Every year, about 80,000 donor searches are initiated across the globe.

Mainly due to the lack of a matching donor, India has one of the highest ratios of searches that do not result in transplantation. At DKMS, we are working to find a donor for every patient in need and require your support in achieving the same here in India. Through this venture with BMST, we are delighted to be able to save many more lives, but we still need to do more. Indian patients mainly require an Indian tissue match which means that we need to increase the awareness and encourage many more people in India to register as a blood stem cell donor. It only takes a few minutes to register as a potential donor. All that is required is a simple swab of the inside of your cheeks to determine your HLA characteristics – so please come forward and join the registry”, **said Dr Elke Neujahr, Global Chief Operating Officer at DKMS.**

Chirag, a 12 year old beta-thalassemia patient waited for 10 years for an unrelated matching donor to undergo a blood stem cell transplant. A donor for him was found in the database of DKMS and he underwent the transplant two years ago at Apollo Chennai. **Present at the launch, Chirag’s father said,** “We struggled for over 10 years seeing our child undergo a blood transfusion every fortnight. Despite this emotional trauma, we were still doubtful to undergo the blood stem cell transplant for our son when we found a donor. After talking to parents of other successful transplant cases we gathered courage. Today, we cannot stop thanking Dr Revathi and the team that met us several times, helped us overcome our concerns and counselled us to take this life saving step”.