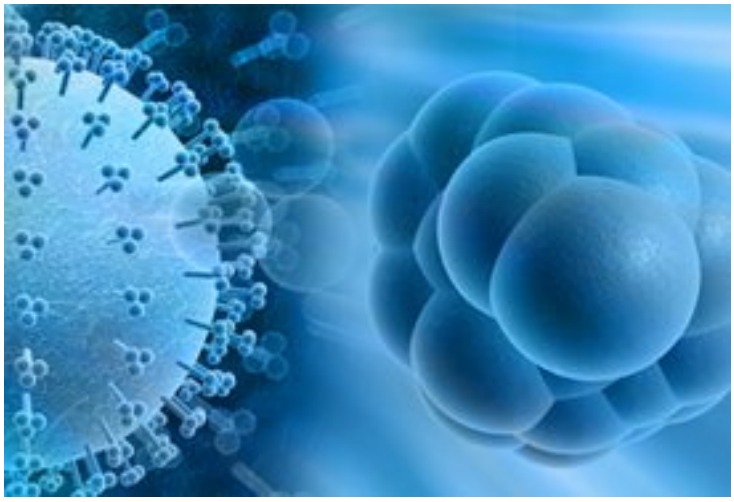
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Chennai gets new Stem Cell Registry

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Chennai gets new Stem Cell Registry



In a bid to help Indians with blood cancers, Thalassemia, Sickle Cell Disease and other curable blood disorders, Chennai-based Jeevan Blood Bank and Research Centre has launched Jeevan Stem Cell Registry.

Jeevan claims to have a track record of establishing sustainable social impact projects with the support of the community and corporate houses. Jeevan established a blood bank in 1995, a Public Cord Blood Bank in 2005, a high resolution HLA typing laboratory in 2013 and now the blood bank has launched a registry of peripheral blood stem cell donors (traditionally known as bone marrow donor registry).

Transplantation of stem cells from donated cord blood or from bone marrow donors offer 60 to 80% chance of cure for some blood disorders like Thalassemia, blood cancers and immune disorders. However, only 30% of these patients are able to find a match within the family. Donated cord blood can be the solution for children. Others need to search for donors in the community. Committed bone marrow donors remain the only hope for adult patients. Despite a match, several still die without transplant because of the high cost of the matching stem cell unit.

Jeevan will recruit 50,000 bone marrow donors from across India over the next 5 years or earlier. These potential donors will be in the age group of 20 and 40 and from a pool of voluntary blood donors from across India. To qualify, they should have donated blood or platelets twice in the previous two years. For this, Jeevan will be working with blood banks and blood donor organisations across India.

The cost of high resolution Human Leucocyte Antigen (HLA) typing for the first 6000 donors is being funded through a grant from Jamsetji Tata Trust. Jeevan hopes to raise funds for this project from the corporates under the CSR programme and through tax exempted public donations. The project cost could come down by 30%, if the Government of India decides to waive the customs duty on the reagents and the Government of Tamil Nadu considers waiving the VAT.

Even though the stem cell donation is voluntary, it will cost approximately Rs. 3 lakhs for the process of collecting, testing and transporting the stem cells to the transplant centre within India. For the patient, stem cells will be made available on a cost recovery basis. The cost is expected to be less than Rs. 3 Lakhs as against the prevailing cost of Rs.8 Lakhs (Indian Registries) to 25 Lakhs (international registries).

Commenting on the launch, Dr P Srinivasan, Co-Founder & Chairman of Jeevan Blood Bank and Research Centre, said, "Unlike other registries (i.e. by sending DNA samples to USA), Jeevan has established its own High Resolution HLA laboratory at a cost of 2 crores. The founders bring in their experience of running a pathology laboratory for over 20 years."

He further added, "Major challenges will come up once you find a matching donor who registered to give stem cells. Universal experience is that 9 out of 10 will back-out. Hence sustained commitment of the 'potential donor' is the key factor for success. To address this, Jeevan will only be recruiting blood/platelet donors who have donated at-least twice in the past two years. These donors know about altruism and have the desire to save lives. Moreover, repeat blood donors are considered to be safe."

"However the cost of stem cells from a matching donor still remains the first obstacle. For example, one of the registries in India apparently charges 8 to 10 lakhs and a unit from any international registries will cost 15 to 25 lakhs. Jeevan's philosophy is quick and affordable access. We believe that it should not cost more than 2.5 lakhs to harvest, test, HLA type and transport the stem cells from an altruistic donor. Hence Jeevan's commitment is to keep it under 3 Lakhs," commented Dr Srinivasan.