

Stem cell banking just got bigger in India

What could be more precious than gifting your unborn child a way to fight blood, genetic and immune system diseases for the rest of his or her life? Sure enough, many Indians are waking up to the magic of stem cell banking.

'Already 300 people have approached us for information on stem cell banking,' said V.R. Chandramouli, managing director of Europe's largest stem cell banking company, Cryo-Save, which launched operations in the country in December.

The company obviously realises the huge potential in this business in India, a country of a billion plus people. It has invested over Rs.10 million in 10 stem cell storage banks opened this month.

A couple of companies in India were already dealing with stem cell banking like LifeCell, Chennai; and Reliance Life Sciences. Stem cells from umbilical cord blood are collected at the time of delivery when the cord connecting the baby to mother is cut.

'Stem cell therapy has the potential to radically change the treatment of human disease. Cord blood technology has been used in the US since 1990. Parents and guardians are increasingly seeking to store their children's stem cells as an insurance policy against future life-threatening diseases,' Chandramouli told IANS.

Umbilical cord blood stem cells have been used over the years in an increasing number of treatments including leukaemia, malignant tumours, blood disorders, red cell disorders and more.

Currently research in the use of stem cells to treat more than 85 diseases is being undertaken.

'Stem cells have the potential to grow into any other type of cells. They are the building blocks of the blood and immune system that can reproduce into other cell types, including heart, muscle and nerve,' Chandramouli said.

Stem cells are the natural repair kit of the human body. In the last few years, more than 10,000 patients in over 150 countries have been treated with cord blood stem cell transplants.

The company is offering a stem cell storage kit at Rs.75,000 that includes the cost of collecting stem cells at the time of delivery to processing and preserving it for next 21 years.

'The couple interested in storing stem cells may contact the company two months before the scheduled delivery. Our counsellors will approach them and guide them about the process. After 21 years, we will charge a minimal annual fee to store it for a lifetime,' Chandramouli said.

The company has also tied up with several hospitals and gynaecologists with the intention of making expecting mothers aware about the benefits of stem cell therapy.

According to Chandramouli, Cryo-Save is the only company in India that offers a fully automated dual-storage system.

'We will store the stem cells in two different packets so that it can be used twice. The multiple

storage facility can also help in stems cells from a baby being used for treating other family members,' he said.

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