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Present your baby with life

Cord Blood Banking is a rising trend

BY SHWETHA KANNAN

Neha Sharma (31), an ex-journalist, Shruti (31) a content developer and Chithra Sridhar (37) a homemaker are neither relatives, nor friends, but there is something that connects all the three ladies -- their kids' umbilical cords. All the three mothers have preserved their children's umbilical cord blood.

"Our daughter is a precious one. We have heard that preserving cord blood will help her in case she's ever affected by any ailment in the future. I heard about this concept during 30-minute presentation about cord blood preservation at a pregnancy class," said Chithra.

It looks like that the concept of preserving cord blood has caught up with the aam Mumbaikars as well. "Yes, this concept is very popular. Around 80 per cent of my patients are opting for it," said Dr. Duru Shah, Chairman, Gynaec-world, Kemps Corner.

While K.V. Subramaniam, president and CEO of Reliance Life Sciences, said, "The trend of preserving cord blood has not only been adopted by Mumbaikars, but by people all across India, thanks

to increasing awareness and word-of-mouth publicity."

Quoting statistics, a source close to Life Cell, India's first and largest private stem cell bank, and the pioneers of umbilical cord stem cell banking in India, said that during mid-2008, the number of people opting for cord blood preservation with the bank was around 50-60, but within a span of 18 months, the number has increased to more than 120.

Joel D'Mello, Relationship Manager, Cryobanks International, India, says that there might be more than 10,000 donors across Mumbai who have done cord blood preservation with five different organisations.

"During its three and a half years of operation, Cryobanks has had 2,800 people opting for cord blood preservation in Mumbai itself. Five years ago, nobody wanted to get this done. The reasons were lack of information and apprehension to try out the new concept. But awareness has now increased and more people are opting for preservation," said Joel.

So what makes this blood from the cord that connects a baby to its mother, so special? Dr. Anjali Tillu,

gynaecologist and obstetrician, said, "The advantage is that it is like an insurance or a mediclaim policy. You may not need it right away, but still there is no harm in having it. It will benefit not only the child, but also its siblings, if the need arises. These are embryonic



cells and can differentiate into any cell that is required. They can be preserved for 15-20 years from the date of collection. Leukaemia, bone related problems, thalassaemia and spinal injuries are some diseases that can be cured. The recent success story of stem cells is the cure of retinoblastoma, a cancer that develops in the retina."

So, which strata of society opts

for cord blood preservation? According to Dr. Shah, this concept is more popular with people who have the money. The process is quite expensive," said Dr. Shah. "The government should take this up as a public agenda so that every mother can get her cord blood preserved," she added.

"At Reliance Life Sciences, we have cord blood samples from children of parents coming from diverse professional backgrounds. The market in general, is driven by the growth in economy and income levels," said Subramaniam.

But money is not the only deterrent because companies providing cord blood banking services have various schemes and modes of payment for people wanting to go for cord blood banking.

Lack of awareness also seems to be a reason why this concept has not reached the lower classes of the society. According to a source from Life Cell, gynaecologists should speak to their patients about it. "People from the lower classes are not privy to the internet and other sources of information regarding preservation of cord blood. So, they do not know much about it," he added. ■

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