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Stem cell-based therapies being developed

Aditi Utpat | TNN

Pune: Many parents are now preserving the cord blood of their children in the hope that it can be used to combat future disease. Stem cells, obtained from the umbilical cord-blood immediately after the birth of the baby, can help in regenerating various cells and tissues in the body.

"Once in a lifetime opportunity" is the oft-cited reason why many doctors and parents are supporting this choice. Mayur Abhaya, president of Lifecell International, a lab for storing cord blood in Chennai says, "Stem cells are derived from the umbilical cord, which is otherwise discarded immediately after the birth. So, there are no ethical issues involved in it."

Reliance Life Sciences, a cord-blood repository and research lab in Mumbai, is currently developing a wide range of stem-cell-based therapies in order to address spinal injuries, metabolic disorders, haematological diseases, oncological diseases, burns and wound management, diabetic and venous ulcers, skin pigmentation disorders, orthopedic as well as infertility disorders.

K.V. Subramaniam, president and chief operating officer of Reliance Life Sciences said that the facility currently has 4,000 samples stored from all over the country. "Cord blood can be a valuable treatment option at any point in time," Subramaniam said.

While new research in the area could prove to be a boon to parents, doctors say the biggest impediment is the cost factor. "Storage of cord blood can cost upto Rs 60,000. All parents may not be able to afford it," says Smita Jog, president of the Pune gynaecologists' association.

Jog said that the other concerns of parents revolve around whether they stand to benefit from it in the long run, and whether the stem cells will be preserved as promised. "Also, some people want to just enjoy the moment of birth of the baby, and don't want to think of diseases that he or she may fall prey to in the future," she added.

Did you know?

Reliance Life Sciences currently has over 4000 samples in its repository while Lifecell India has over 15,000 samples.

Cord blood has been successfully used to treat over 75 blood-related disorders including deadly diseases like leukaemia.

Stem cells are a genetically unique resource. Your baby's stem cells have a 25% probability of being a perfect match for a sibling - should he or she need a stem cell transplant.

Cord blood preservation can avoid several invasive surgeries and hospitalization in the future.

Stem cells be used to treat genetically inherited diseases - if one of the siblings carries the disease and the other sibling does not, cord blood from the normal sibling can be used to treat the diseased sibling.

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