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Stem cell transplants give ray of hope to blood cancer patients

Ludhiana : If it was not for the stem cell transplants, 40-year-old Binder Pal from Phillaur and a 26-year-old girl from Hoshiarpur would have found themselves helpless to survive the deadly lymphoblastic leukaemia and lymphoma respectively.

While Binder Pal underwent allogenic stem cell transplant (wherein cells from his brother's body were infused into his), Suman (name changed) went for autologous stem cell transplant and a bone marrow transplant was conducted on her with stem cells taken from her own body.

Today they are hail and hearty, thanks to stem cell transplants performed on them at two city hospitals.

The two cases do not only highlight the life-saving benefits of stem cell treatment, they also provide a boost to the struggle for the acceptance of stem cell therapy as a recognised field in the medical profession.

“Stem cell treatment is at a nascent stage but we need to understand the life-saving potential of such procedures. As stem cell treatment is becoming available at hospitals across the city, we are hopeful that more and more people will come forward in support of the efficacy of stem cell transplants,” said Karan Goel, an entrepreneur and chairman and founder of Stem Cell Voice of India, which is creating awareness about stem cell treatment.

“The adult stem cell transplants are being performed in the country regularly now and both autologous and allogenic stem cell transplants are feasible and available at various centres, there is a need to have cord blood cell banks to facilitate cord blood cell procedures too. On the other hand, embryonic and foetal stem cell procedures have some ethical issues,” Karan said.

There is only one public cord blood cell bank, Jeevan Stem Cell Bank in Chennai, and about six private such banks in the country, he informs.

“The allogenic stem cell transplant performed on Binder Pal was the first in the state. The allogenic stem cell transplant is still not that prevalent in the state and only Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER) has previously performed such procedure north of Delhi,” says Dr. Joseph John, consultant haematologist and haemato-oncologist at Christian Medical College and hospital, who performed the treatment on a patient.

“We are confident that we will perform more such procedures in the future now,” he adds, saying that the next thing in the stem cell transplant is cord blood cell banking.

Dr. Sandeep Jasuja, assistant professor of Oncology at DMCH who conducted the autologous bone marrow transplant on Suman says autologous bone marrow transplant is more feasible and also safer than allogenic transplant as autologous transplant does not require prolonged use of immunosuppressant drugs with less mortality and morbidity and cost (approximately Rs 5-6 lakh per procedure) as compared to allogenic transplant (Rs 6- 10 lakh).