

Cord blood banking takes off in Nagpur

Snehlata Shrivastav, TNN May 16, 2012, 03.00AM IST

NAGPUR: Nagpur is emerging as a big destination for companies associated with 'cord blood banking' or CBB. In the last few years three big names in the field have established their offices in the city. Interestingly, the city has responded well enough with [the middle](#) and upper middle classes opting for storing the cord blood of children for future use. Cord blood can be used for treating certain [genetic](#) diseases that are otherwise non-treatable now in the child or siblings and can also be used for treating conditions like cancer, heart diseases and necrosis of hip joint etc.

The three CBB companies that have made it to city since 2008 are Reliance Life Cell which was the first one, Cryo Bank and Babycell. Babycell began operations about nine months ago but announced formal expansion here only this month. Chief scientific officer of Babycell Satyen Sanghavi said that in the last two years since his company started its bank in Lonavla, about 4000 parents have stored their child's cord blood. "The cord cells have to be collected within 15 minutes of the delivery. It is collected in special kits and then is sent to the storing unit maintaining a cold chain," he explained.

Umbilical cord blood is very rich in stem cells. [Stem cells](#) are actually the master cells of human body and possess the ability to create tissues, organs and organ system of all types. These can be used to treat disease like cancer, [diabetes](#), heart and liver disease, [muscular dystrophy](#), Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease, spinal cord injury and stroke. Stem cells specifically reach the defective place and correct the damage by forming new disease free cells and tissues of specific types.

Although the number of parents opting for such storage has increased from just two to five a year to two to three monthly, they are mostly the upper middle class who can afford to invest as much as Rs 70-80,000, the storage fees for 21 years and others with a history of genetic diseases like the thalassaemia, sickle cell, leukaemia or blood [cancer](#) etc.

Obstetricians and gynaecologists admit the facility is expensive and hence cannot be for the masses. Dr Mangala Ketkar, senior gynaecologist, says that she does not advise cord blood banking to everyone. "I suggest this to patients who can afford it and those who have a family history of genetic diseases like thalassaemia, sickle cell, leukaemia

etc," she said. She does keep the information brochures available for the patients and relatives.

Dr Ujjwala Deshmukh, former president of Nagpur Obstetrics and Gynaecological Society (NOGS) is not in total favour of the cord blood banking as it does not benefit a majority. She is also not sure of the reliability of the companies who are into it. "How do you ensure the cord blood cells will be maintained scientifically for 25-30 years without any deterioration in quality? Also, very people are likely to need cord blood anytime in their life for treatment. I am not against using cord cells for treatment but it is only the rich who can block so much money for such a distant possibility," she said.

Dr Ankita Kothe, NOGS president, though not against the concept, is not completely in favour either. Her apprehensions too stem from the concern about quality of stored cord cells 25-30 years later. "More studies are still need to establish the use of the cord blood stem cells in cure of certain diseases. There is not enough data as yet both at world and at country level to prove efficacy of the results. There are also many legal and social implications. It is too early to speak in favour or against cord blood banking," she stated.

Dr Maushmi Joshi, who has been collecting enough cord blood cells for patients in her practice in some metros where she worked earlier, says, "I do not recommend it directly. I leave the information with the patients and they decide. In recent years more and more families are opting for it. Money factor is there with those who can afford it going for it," she said. She believes the companies who are into a competitive business will definitely have state-of-the-art facilities and patients could trust them. Joshi says there are certain companies that offer EMIs to persons who cannot invest the amount in one go. The EMIs extend for 24 months or more