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Cord blood banking slowly catching up

An alien concept until a few months ago, cord blood and tissue banking is fast catching up in Vizag. Though an expensive affair, expectant parents are not willing to take any risk about their baby's future and are evincing interest in preserving their child's umbilical cord blood stem cells for future use.

The regenerative medicine field is the new frontier in medicine where scientists and clinicians alike agree that stem cells found in cord blood are one of the most promising sources for cellular therapy. Cord blood transplants have been performed for patients with genetic or metabolic diseases and have the capability to treat more than 80 diseases. These stem cells are taken from the umbilical cord blood shortly after birth. Once the umbilical cord has been clamped and cut, a nurse or a doctor will collect blood from the cord. Later, they preserve it in a special facility at -196°C with liquid nitrogen. When it is needed, stem cells are thawed and are ready to use in transplant therapy. It was a few inquiries from educated parents from Vizag that prompted Florida-based Cryobanks International India Pvt Ltd to open its office here a year ago. Now Cryobanks has around 220 clients in Vizag alone. Cryobanks collect Rs.75,000 for preserving cord blood for 21 years at its special facility in Delhi. "Over 50 per cent of our clients are from the middle class, 10 per cent from the lower income group and the rest are affluent. Increased awareness among the general public makes them approach us," said Cryobanks relationship manager, Satish Yemsani.

COO of the newly opened Babycell, Dr Satyen Sanghavi said that they are aggressively rolling out their second phase of expansion plans, and target to increase their presence to 60 cities in the next year.

Dr Radhika, consultant gynaecologist at Manipal Hospital here said that stem cells are already being used to replace other cells in the body that are abnormal or have been destroyed by disease. I believe that regenerative medicine can offer extraordinary medical possibilities to patients in a range of diseases. We also need to help parents understand why it is so important to save their infant's cord blood, added the gynaecologist. Global cord blood bankers like Cryobanks, Stemcyte, Lifecell, Babycell have opened their offices in Vizag.