

The Hindu • Business Line

Thursday, July 21, 2011

Babycell reports spurt in demand to store umbilical cords

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Bangalore, July 19

As if monsoon discounts and off-season FMCG showers are not enough, a stem cell bank has packaged one such plan for babies that will be born on August 15.

Regenerative Medical Services Ltd, a fully owned subsidiary of the Mumbai-based active pharma ingredients manufacturer Satyan Pharmaceuticals P Ltd, said it had seen 25 per cent rise in parents enrolling to store their due-in-August babies' umbilical cord blood cells after it offered earlier this month an 85 per cent cut for Independence Day births.

The average monthly strike rate for RMS's cord blood stem cell banking arm Babycell was 275 enrolments, according to Mr Satyen Sanghavi, Chief Scientist of the family-owned RMS.

Pan-India, "cord blood stem cell banking has an annual growth rate of 230 per cent.

Since we started operating in 2009, 2500 people have enrolled with us," said Mr Sanghavi.

Among Babycell's customers are a vegetable vendor from Vashi, TV artistes, celebrities and companies.

The demand among parents to store their unborn child's umbilical cord cells at birth was only going up, he said, even as the draft guidelines on stem cell research and banking await approval. Started in November 2009, Babycell generates 60 per cent of RMS's turnover — which includes another regenerative stream, that of therapies using adult stem cells.

It was partly this growth of the cord blood stem cell banking that was driving Babycell to new cities and towns. "We are now focussing on the South and East. Although there are three major companies in the South we expect to do 35 per cent of sales from the South by 2012," Mr Sanghavi said.

Apart from Fortis and bou-

tique child-birth clinic Cradle in Bangalore, Babycell is in talks to tie up with top hospitals for connecting with parents-to-be; and with diagnostic labs which would be collection franchisees in Coimbatore, Kochi, Hyderabad, Patna, Nagpur and Nashik. The samples are screened and stored at the Rs 25-crore Lonavla lab.

Through its technology tie-up with South Korea's Sewon Cellontech, RMS provides cellular therapies that re-grow tissues from adult cells. Mr Sanghavi said hospitals used them to treat burns, wounds, knee joint problems, pain, cosmetic and gynaecological procedures. "There is a huge potential for stem cell therapies that can treat 75 diseases from leukaemia, thalassaemia to diabetes and brain injury. It is wrong to say there are too many cord blood banks. In fact, by 2015, there would be 15 registered companies compared to the present seven or eight," Mr Sanghavi added.