

Teen gets new lease of life with German's stem cells

Kochi: In a rare and fortunate incident, a sixteen-year-old girl from Kozhikode, who has been suffering from acute myeloid leukaemia, got a new lease of life through the stem cells donated by a 55-year-old German national.

"The marrow transplant, which took place three months ago, has been a success and the girl is now getting back to normal," said Dr Neeraj Sidharthan, head of stem cell transplant unit at Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences and Research Centre, Kochi. This is perhaps one of the rarest transnational stem cell donation cases in the country, he said.

"It was very difficult to get a donor in this case," said Sidharthan.

"In around 25% of the cases, we get donors from the immediate family. But in this particular case, the cells did not match. So, we had to go for a matched unrelated donor (MUD transplant) where the donor is one from the general public. However, from the 70,000 donors registered in India, we couldn't find a single

HOW IT WORKS

➤ Acute myeloid leukaemia is a potentially lethal malignancy of blood cells. If there is a relapse, the only curative option is stem cell transplant



➤ Stem cell transplant is the

medical procedure in which the diseased bone marrow is replaced by specialized cells. The donor's cells will replace the receiver's cancerous blood cells. This strengthens the immune system of the cancer-affected person

match," said the doctor. The 55-year-old donor was finally located from the Germany-based international registry DKMS.

Once the donor was finalized, the girl was admitted to the institute for pre-transplant tests and administration of chemotherapeutic drugs to prevent side-effects as the stem cells were to come from an international donor of the opposite sex. The healthy cells were harvested from the donor and airlifted from Dusseldorf to Cologne in Germany, and later to Kochi via Abu Dhabi.

The stem cells were transfused into the girl on March 6 by a team of doctors led by Sidharthan. Sudhakaran Kaattuparambil, father of the girl, said

his daughter is getting back to normal.

"She was identified with cancer in 2011 and was under treatment since then. Chemotherapy did help for a while but after that we were told to go for a marrow transplant in order to move on. It was difficult to find a donor. Thankfully we got one. I think there should be more awareness on stem cell donation in the country so that lives like hers can be saved," said Sudhakaran.

The transplant alone came up to a cost of Rs 6 lakh, he said.

Sidharthan said that of the 1.25 billion population in our country, only one lakh have signed up for bone marrow donation in India.