

## Aster CMI launches initiative for blood stem cell donor registration

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In order to call out stem cell donation as the need of the hour for blood cancer patients in India, Aster CMI Hospital is launching a donor registration campaign by inviting people to register as stem cell donors. In addition to all Aster employees getting registered as stem cell donors on that day, it will be an open to all event in order to provide general public an opportunity to register themselves as stem cell donors and relieve India of its whopping burden of blood cancer and blood related disorder. DATRI, India's biggest stem cell registry has come on-board and will collaborate with Aster CMI in the donor registration drive.

While about only 2,000 stem cell transplants take place in India every year, around 80,000 to 1,00,000 annual transplants are required to tackle the large burden of blood cancers and fatal blood disorders. The stem cell donation drive by Aster CMI is expected to bust several myths related to stem cell donation, preventing adequate number of donors from getting registered. Also, it will spread awareness among most Indians who do not have the knowledge that a one-time stem cell donation can give a new lease of life to a dying patient and is safe and causes negligible pain and discomfort.

A significant percentage of the urgent need for transplants can be met if more Indians come forward to register themselves and donate stem cells. India has only about 4 lakh donors registered on a stem cell registry. Because of the small database of donors in India, the chances of finding a donor match are as low as 10-15% as compared to the west, where the chances are as high as 60-70%. In order for a successful match to be made, both donor and patient must have an HLA match depending on the type of transplant. It is difficult to find the right match, even within the own family, where only 30 per cent of people are able to find a match with their siblings. Unlike blood donation, not many are registered as stem cell donors. For patients such as those diagnosed with Leukemia, a blood stem cell transplant is the only chance of a cure. However, people believe that their energy levels would be depleted if they donate blood stem cells which is not true and all that is required is a simple swab of the inside of one's cheeks.

Commenting on this initiative, Dr. Vijay Agarwal, Lead & Sr. Consultant Medical Oncology & Hematology, Aster CMI Hospital

said: "There is a need to increase awareness and encourage more people in India to register as blood stem cell donors. There is lack of awareness on the ground, and also misinformation to some extent. It takes just a couple of minutes to register as a potential donor. The only thing that is required is a simple swab of the inside of your cheeks to determine your HLA characteristics. Given this easy way of registering, I would request more people to come forward and join the registry."

To register / pledge, he or she will first have to fill a registration form and consent form, followed by a cheek swab. The cell sample is then sent to a lab to determine the Human Leukocyte Antigen (HLA) type, which is saved in the registry. These donors are then on the registry till 60 years of age. They could get the rare opportunity to give hope of a second chance at life to their genetic twin by donating their renewable blood stem cells through a safe process.

A survivor, Sonia (name changed), who was a recipient of stem cells from a donor said: "I have had a miraculous life. I waited for very long for the donation and it was a critical period of my life. It is not easy to go through cancer and blood cancer in particular has few survivors."

"It is the best feeling in the world to save a life and be responsible to our community and the feeling of meeting the person who is alive because of you would be the biggest high in one's life," said a donor Saieesh.

Speaking at the event, Dr Azad Moopen, Founder Chairman and Managing Director of Aster DM Healthcare, said: "At Aster, it has always been a priority to bridge the gap between patients in-need and access to the required medical care. This initiative for enrolling donors for BMT organized as a part of the Aster Volunteers with support from DATRI, we would like to increase the awareness around stem cell donation. Employees of Aster across the globe shall register themselves as a stem cell donor for saving lives through BMT."

Reeth Abraham, renowned athlete and Arjuna awardee who is the chief guest at the event, said: "Many patients suffering from blood cancer and other blood disorders need a blood stem cell transplant to survive. Unfortunately, the majority of patients are never able to receive a transplant due to unavailability of a matching blood stem cell donor. A lack of understanding and multiple misconceptions existing amongst people about the process, impacts the cause. This is why we should join hands and build up a strong awareness and stem cell donor data base in order to help our fellow countrymen who are in need of stem cell to survive and make India a better place to live in."

Aster DM Healthcare Limited is one of the largest private healthcare service providers operating in multiple GCC states and is an emerging healthcare player in India. With an inherent emphasis on clinical excellence the Company is one of the few entities in the world with a strong presence across primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary healthcare through its 24 hospitals, 116 clinics and 219 pharmacies. These are manned by our 18,700+ employees from across the geographies that we are present in, delivering on a simple yet strong promise to its people: "We'll treat you well."