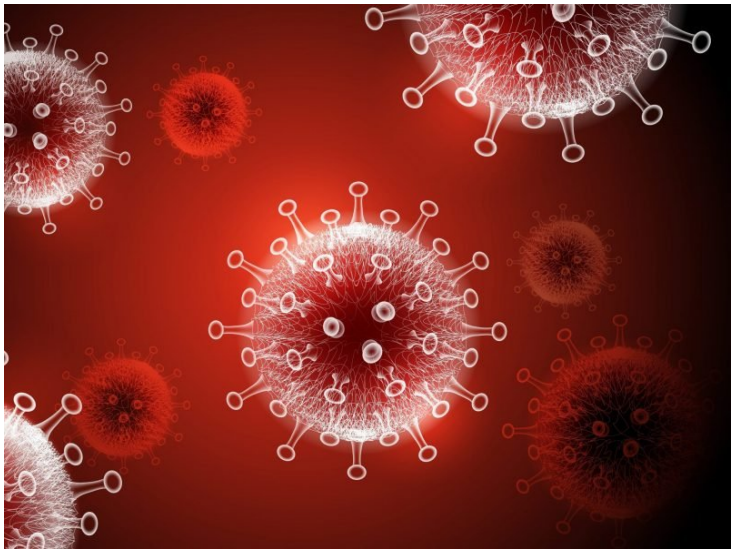
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COVID 19 impacts patients with blood cancer and related disorders

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Blood stem cell transplant and registrations come to a halt due to COVID-19



Doctors worry as the pre-aligned blood stem cell transplant procedure comes to a halt due to the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak. Primarily, experts are facing logistics issues as donors are not able to travel to the hospital / collection centers to donate their blood stem cells.

Dr. Sunil Bhat, Senior Consultant in Pediatric Hematology, Oncology and Bone Marrow Transplantation, Narayana Health City said “The corona virus pandemic has posed lot of challenges for patients with hematological-oncological conditions and in need of a blood stem cell transplant. In the context of unrelated blood stem cell transplants there is lots of logistic support needed. The current lockdown situation has impacted the usual process for transporting blood stem cells across borders and countries. This has come to a halt and especially overseas patients requiring transplants urgently are unable to get the blood stem cells from Indian donors. Also, within the country, blood stem cell donor collections have drastically reduced. There is also a fear factor in the voluntary blood stem cell donors about blood stem cell donation during this time.”

Dr. Sunil also added that blood cancer and other blood disorder patients suffer from immune deficiency. Even regular respiratory viruses are a problem and the spread of coronavirus is a major risk for the patients. These patients are more sensitive to infection than any other group, because the treatment itself destroys their own immune system, and replaces it with the donor’s. Thus, the management of such high-risk patients have also become challenging in this situation.

Speaking about the situation Patrick Paul, CEO, DKMS BMST Foundation India, said “Even during the current situation, potential blood stem cell donors registered with DKMS-BMST are contacted daily in order to donate blood stem cells for people facing life-threatening diseases. The health and well-being of the donors will always be our utmost priority.”

When entering the collection center and before any donation a screening for the COVID-19 virus risks is carried out. These measures serve to protect the donor as well as the recipient and the employees in the collection centres. Health experts have confirmed in an important finding, that there is no evidence that the COVID-19 virus can be transmitted via blood, bone marrow, or stem cell products.

Apart from this, physical donor drives are put on hold that has affected potential donor registrations. “The COVID-19 outbreak has prompted people to stay indoors due to which we are not able to conduct blood stem cell donor registration drives. To bridge this gap and continue our fight against blood cancer, we urge people across India to register themselves as potential blood stem cell donors through the online registration link which we recently launched. By doing this, the planned-on ground registration drives can take place digitally instead and the database of potential stem cell donors can increase,” said Patrick Paul, CEO, DKMS BMST Foundation India.

Most often, a blood stem cell transplant is the mainstay of care for patients suffering from blood cancer and related blood disorders. Only about 30% of the patients in need of a stem cell transplant as life-saving treatment can find a sibling match. The rest 70% depend on finding a matching unrelated donor which makes it vital for people to register themselves as potential donors and help save a life.