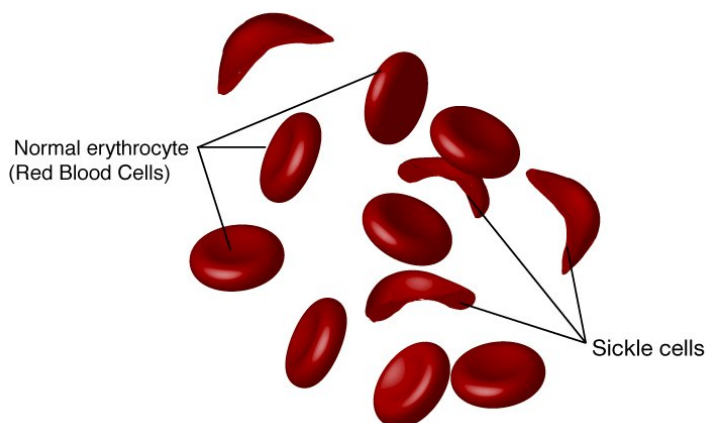


No stem cell project in India to address sickle cell anaemia

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Sickle cell anemia is the most common form of sickle cell disease (SCD). A national multicentric study carried out on behalf of Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) in the last decade indicated that the sickle cell gene was present in all the tribal groups and the gene frequency varied from 0.005 to 0.110. Recently, on being asked about the country's initiatives for addressing this situation, Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Ghulam Nabi Azad mentioned that according to ICMR, currently no stem cell research project has been undertaken to control sickle cell anaemia. Also there is no proposal to set up institute or hospital for the purpose of stem cell research to control sickle cell anaemia.

This disease is largely but not exclusively restricted to tribal groups. Sickle Cell Disease is prevalent throughout Central India starting from Gujarat and Maharashtra in the West and through Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand upto the Eastern State of Odisha. Though there is no sure-shot cure for the disease bone marrow transplant of stem cell transplants are the most popular methods used.

In SCD, the body makes sickle-shaped red blood cells instead of normal disc shaped erythrocytes and contain abnormal hemoglobin called sickle hemoglobin or hemoglobin S. This sickle hemoglobin causes the cells to stick to each other and eventually tend to block blood flow in the blood vessels of the limbs and organs which can lead to pain and organ damage.

The Sickle Cell Society of India, Nagpur has sent a representation regarding setting up of Molecular Genetic Laboratories in the tribal areas where the prevalence of sickle cell anaemia is higher.

The Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakrama (RBSK) recently launched under NRHM, provides for early detection and treatment of sickle cell anaemia among children. State governments can submit proposals for treatment of sickle cell anaemia cases in their respective Programme Implementation Plans (PIPs) for consideration of central assistance under NRHM.