



L - R : Meghnath Roy Chowdhury, MD, Cordlife India; Dr. Ashish Mukherjee, Director, NSRI; Mr. & Mrs. Pal with Moinam and his sister Ahoma and Dr. Prosanto Chowdhury, Medical Director, Cordlife, between the parents.

# India's first successful Mixed Stem Cell transplant

*A ray of hope for Thalassemia infected patients*

**M**oinam, a five year old boy and his family had a reason to rejoice when he was treated for the deadly disease of Thalassemia after a successful stem cell transplant by Dr. Ashish Mukherjee at the Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Cancer Research Institute. Moinam had to undergo the painful and elaborate process of blood transfusion and was on medication until stem cell transplant from cordblood and bone marrow gave him a new life. He is now in a recovery phase and is expected to get completely cured as his blood tests have been positive. The stem cells that were transplanted came from his sister's cord blood and bone marrow.

For Thalassemia, when an HLA identical sibling marrow donor is available, the chance of cure is currently over 90%. Other than

*"It was only after a long wait of five years that we were gifted with a baby boy (Moinam) on February 25, 2005. My pregnancy was very easy and uncomplicated. We had no reason to believe that our son would be in any way unhealthy in the future.*

*Moinam was barely one year old when we noticed that he looked pale and tired, which prompted us to consult a pediatrician in Siliguri. The doctor put Moinam through a blood test and found that he had an abnormally low haemoglobin count of 8.6 compared to a normal count of 11.5 for children of his age. Before the doctor could conclude his diagnosis, he prescribed Moinam an iron-based tonic for a month, hoping that the poor child was suffering from nothing more than a minor form of anaemia. A month later, our son once again underwent a blood test. This time, the result was very discouraging. The test showed a further drop in Moinam's haemoglobin level. Our biggest fear came through when the electrophoresis test confirmed that my child was suffering from HbE-Beta Thalassemia."*

— Manisha Pal

contributing the major amount of stem cells, using a sibling's cord blood for transplant lowers the chances of donor rejection, and is therefore considered a preferred source for transplantation compared to using stem cells from a non-related source, which gives inferior results.

Stem cells from the cordblood of the second child was harvested, processed, tested and preserved under specified conditions by CordLife. Dr. Prosanto Chowdhury, Medical Director, CordLife India said "When stem cells are needed to treat a life-threatening disease, doctors can effectively predict transplant success by evaluating two factors - HLA compatibility and stem cell count. A transplant unit's stem cell count in relation to the recipient's body weight is called the

cell dose, and it is the most significant predictor for overall transplant survival. In situations like haematological malignancies, the clock is ticking and the stem cells are to be procured and transplanted at the earliest, so keeping the stem cells, and using them when required, is the key to success. Transplants like these confirm CordLife's technology and our assurance to parents who bank with us their baby's cord blood. HLA matching was undertaken, which proved that the tissues of both the children matched and the treatment could proceed. Moreover, this is the first case of mixed stem cell transplant in India."

There are about 10,000 thalassemic children born each year in India, and most of them do not live beyond ten years. This revolutionary development in the healthcare industry will help to fight life threatening diseases like Thalassemia and Leukemia. ■ BE Bureau

## What is Thalassemia

Thalassemia is an inherited blood disorder in which the body produces an abnormal form of hameoglobin, the metallo - protein in red blood cells that carries oxygen. The disorder causes severe anaemia which if untreated can lead to a dramatically decreased life-expectancy.

### Symptoms

- Paleness
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Jaundice
- Spleen enlargement

### Treatment

- Iron Chelation therapy
- Folic Acid supplements
- Blood and marrow stem cell transplant

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