

Take stem cells abroad at zero cost

Subhendu Maiti

letters@hindustantimes.com

KOLKATA: Business is booming for the lone stem cell bank in Kolkata and times are so good that the management has decided to waive charges for transporting the stem cells to clients anywhere in the world.

"The cost of transporting stem cells to London and New York will be between ₹ 50,000 and ₹ 60,000," said Meghnad Roy Chowdhury, managing director of Cordlife Sciences India, a joint venture between an Australian and a Kolkata-based company. Stem cells have to be transported in cryogenic chambers, which preserve these cells at -150°C. Kolkata accounts for about 7,500 of the bank's 30,000 clients. The rest are from eastern India.

"We are giving this offer to would-be parents who want to store their babies' stem cells in our bank. Sometimes, many couples leave Kolkata storing their babies' cord blood. They can contact us even from US, UK or anywhere across the world seeking stem cells of their babies," said Roy Chowdhury.

The parents (clients of the bank) will have to show papers relating to the specialists and the medical institutions where the transplantations will be performed. "This new service will help clients in different parts of the world," Roy Chowdhury said. "Our client base is rising at more than 100 per cent as compared to when we set up shop in 2008. In Kolkata, we are getting new

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clients in our bank every month."

Prasanta Chowdhury, medical director of Cordlife, said: "Our bank has around 30,000 clients in India. We operate in six other Asia Pacific countries including Singapore, Hong Kong, Philippines and Australia."

Stem cells can be stored for 21 years. The stem cells transport service will remain viable throughout the contractual period of about 21 years. Cordlife will also give its client family a benefit of about \$25,000 to defray medical costs in case their original cord blood unit loses its viability.

If a transplant is required by a client, CordLife will, at any point of time within the tenure of the storage period, provide all relevant information regarding transplant physicians, transplant centres and other logistical support. A client will have to pay an EMI of Rs 1,700 for the first 24 months after storing the stem cells of their baby in the Cordlife bank. Later, they have to pay an installment of Rs 3,600 every year throughout 21 years.

"Only four other cities Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai and Bangalore have stem cells banks," said the MD.

