

Cancer survivor meets her cell donor

Avinash Singh Sudan

NEW DELHI: After 18 months, blood cancer survivor Manju Sharma met the man who donated his stem cells for the transplant which saved her life.

For a long time at the event organised by an NGO here on Friday, Manju just kept quiet, not knowing how to begin thanking Akash Grover.

Both of them were seeing each other for the first time after the surgery, which took place one and a half year ago, at a donor-recipient meet organised by Chennai-based voluntary organisation, Datri.

The NGO reveals the identity of anonymous donors and recipients only after the treatment is successful.

Calling Akash a "lifesaving donor", the 50-year-old woman said, "The blood stem cells donated by Akash helped me fight acute myeloid leukemia." That is an aggressive form of blood cancer.

"How are you feeling now?" was the first question that the 29-year-old entrepreneur asked Manju. "I am doing good. Thank you for your support. I would not have done it without it," she replied.

"If I am here today, it's only because of you," continued Manju, a resident of Kurukshetra in Haryana.

Manju, a widow, underwent the transplant surgery at Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Institute in Rohini, in March, 2015.



Blood stem cell donor Akash Grover talks with the recipient Manju Sharma in New Delhi on Friday. DH PHOTO

"Her condition was critical when we found the donor. Any further delay would have caused complications during the surgery," said Dr Narendra Agarwal, haematology oncologist at Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Institute.

"The success rate for the surgery is 60 per cent in case of acute myeloid leukemia, depending on the condition of the patient," he told Deccan Herald. Manju was diagnosed with blood cancer in December 2014 and advised blood stem cell transplant. "When I got to know that none of my family members were a match, I was very apprehensive of getting a transplant from a stranger," said Manju.

"But I feel fortunate to have

found a perfect match from a completely unknown person. I am thankful to this donor who decided to gift me a new life with his blood stem cells."

Manju was admitted at the hospital for a month for the surgery.

"I had been asked to rent an apartment in the vicinity of the institute for regular health checkups. So I stayed in the rented accommodation for three months in Rohini," said the mother of two sons.

"After that I moved back to my home but kept visiting the institute once a week," she added. Akash told Deccan Herald that he was initially meant to help another patient.

"In 2014, I registered as a donor when another patient's

family had organised a drive for finding a match through Datri. But I was not a match," he said.

"After some time I got a call from Datri and came to know I was a match for another patient." That was Manju.

He learnt more about blood stem cell donation over the internet. "Once I was convinced, I went ahead with the process," he added.

"Such an occasion is additional motivation to work harder and make the registry grow. The joy that a recipient's family receives and the satisfaction a donor expresses is in itself a testimony of hope," said Raghu Rajagopal, Datri's co-founder and CEO.

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