

# Stem cell as easy as blood donation: Experts

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Shrinking families and lack of awareness are a hurdle for stem cell donations across the country, said experts on World Cancer Day.

They add that despite being as easy as blood donation, stem cell donation registration has been minimal in the country.

"Only 30 per cent of

the cases in need of stem cells are able to find a match among family members. And in case of unrelated people the chances are up to 40 per cent," says Dr Jose M. Easow, senior consultant, medical oncologist with the Apollo speciality cancer hospital.

He adds that with families shrinking, the possibility of finding a match is on the downward trend, emphasising on

the need for national registries and more donors to register. He adds that lack of awareness has been a key factor in the issue.

Presently there are three directories in the country. Daitri is the largest with a database of 70,000 voluntary donors and it has facilitated 82 transplants.

The CEO of Daitri, Mr Raghu Rajagopal, says that there are more than

20 million registered donors in the world, however in India, lack of proper awareness and some misconception are preventing people from donating. As a result there are very few registered donors. He adds, "Some assume that it might be painful or lead to some physiological defects, which is untrue."

Dr Jose adds, "The transplant allows a patient suffering from

cancer and benign disorders to improve survival. The patient often otherwise has to depend on hospitals for frequent transfusions."

"It is only during the mid 90's that we came to know that stem cells could be taken from the blood too, earlier it was extracted from the marrow."

Dr Revathi Raj, pediatric hemato oncologist, says that significant

improvement has occurred in the treatment of childhood cancers. She adds, "Now we have a technology and infrastructure to enable the treatment of blood related disorders. While earlier we had to depend mostly on foreign registries to find an unrelated matched donor where the probabilities of a match were lower, now we have a viable option through the registry."