

# Stem cell databank project remains non-starter, courtesy fund crunch

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Conceived in 2014, the Union Health Ministry's project to set up a National Stem Cell Donor Registry to help patients suffering from life threatening blood disorders like Blood Cancer, Thalassemia and Aplastic Anemia has remained a non-starter due to absence of funds.

The proposed project would have helped patients find a possible match through the registry having a databank of diverse voluntary donors for live bone marrow or stem cells from umbilical cord blood.

"In a recent meeting, the project failed to take off once again because of unavailability of ₹250 crore fund to be made available through the National Health Mission (NHM)," said an official from the Ministry.

At present, there are about 2.5 lakh patients afflicted with blood disorders (thalassaemia) and some genetic disorders (Hurler Syndrome) in the world including

## NATIONAL STEM CELL DONOR REGISTRY



India waiting for the stem cell transplantation. Of these, just 30 per cent of patients' need is being met through siblings whose HLA type is a perfect match. HLA type is when the donor's and patient's white blood cell type have an exact match, he said.

The rest 70 per cent find it difficult to get a stem cell donor with an HLA match. There is a huge gap between requirement and availability due to lack of a large data

base of well characterised blood stem cell donors in the country.

According to the ICMR, in India in 2010 around 1,04,239 blood and lymphatic malignancies were diagnosed and the number is expected to increase to 1,32,574 cases per year by 2020.

The proposed national registry with donors belonging to diverse ethnic backgrounds aims to give an Indian patient a chance to find a possible match within his/her race/ethnicity, (i.e.) with people sharing the same cultural linguistic, biological traits etc.

Though there over 50 donor registries and more than 18.5 million registered donors across the globe, in India, there is none from the Government sector. There are just a few in the private sector like Chennai-based DATRI. Set up in 2009, it has a wide and diverse database of potential blood stem cell donors that can be accessed by any patient, living anywhere in the world, in need of a blood stem cell transplant.