

Bone marrow from stranger saves 7-yr-old

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Chennai: From his days as a student in Patiala, Naval Chaudhary has never ducked a fight for a cause. The 26-year-old engineering student, who now works as a data scientist with a private bank in Bengaluru, led a fast with 1,000 students in support of social activist Anna Hazare in 2011, and three years later a campaign to boost voter registration for the 2014 parliamentary elections. This past weekend, he was in a different kind of fight — one against thalassemia, a genetic blood disorder, which threatened the life of a seven-year-old boy.

Chaudhary was one of the country's first donors to go under general anaesthesia and let doctors draw marrow from his hipbone for a stranger. On Monday, a day after being discharged from a private hospital, he complained of mild uneasiness and fatigue but said he had



no real reason for having decided to help the young boy. "I don't know him. I don't know why I went through this process, but it feels good even though it is a bit painful," he said.

Doctors are celebrating the donation. "In many patients, cells drawn from the hipbone can quicken recovery and reduce chances of complications such as rejection," said Chennai-based senior haematologist Dr Revathi Raj of Apollo Speciality Hospitals.

In patients with thalassemia, doctors do bone marrow (stem cell) transplant as one of the gold standard treatments. Stem cells are collected from the bone marrow of a matching donor and transplanted into a patient. If the patient is lucky the

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'matching' stem cell donor comes from within the family; for others, the donation comes from unrelated volunteers listed on a registry or from a cord blood bank.

Chaudhary was listed on DATRI, a stem cell registry headquartered in Chennai, which stored his name along with the details of genetic typing in a database of more than 1.3 lakh donors. Normally, transplanted stem cells come from the blood stream — a lengthy blood donation after four days of injections to spur the bone marrow to produce an oversupply of stem cells. The stem cells are then harvested from the blood.

But for the seven-year-old boy, doctors recommended tak-

ing marrow from the hip bone. Chaudhary browsed the internet and spoke to experts. "When my father was ill they drew blood from his marrow for a test. I knew the procedure would be painful. I don't know why I agreed but I found myself convincing my parents that it was the best thing to do," he said.

Doctors at the hospital said the stem cells were infused into the recipient's blood through a special intravenous line. "The cells will find their way to bone marrow, where they gradually restore the recipient's ability to produce red and white blood cells and platelets. This takes about a week. For now, the boy is fine," said Dr Sunil Bhat, paediatric hemato oncologist and bone marrow transplant specialist.

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