

City record: 3 stem cell donations in 2016

The stem cells were used in bone marrow transplants to save the lives of two leukemia patients and one suffering from thalassemia. There have been only two such donations in the past

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Sitting in his chambers at Opera House, haematologist Dr Sunil Parekh holds up his iPhone to show the picture of a chubby-cheeked young girl smiling shyly at the camera. The child, a leukaemia patient, underwent a bone marrow transplant in Chennai in January this year using stem cells donated by a Mumbaikar.

Two more Mumbaikars made stem cell donations in February, enabling a bone marrow transplant procedure on a child suffering from thalassemia in Pune and an adult leukaemia patient in Delhi.

It is a feat of sorts for the fledgling Marrow Donor Registry (India) (MDRI), which is Mumbai's registry of stem cell donors with over 31,000 people in its database. Given that MDRI (the second largest registry in the country after Chennai's DATRI) had

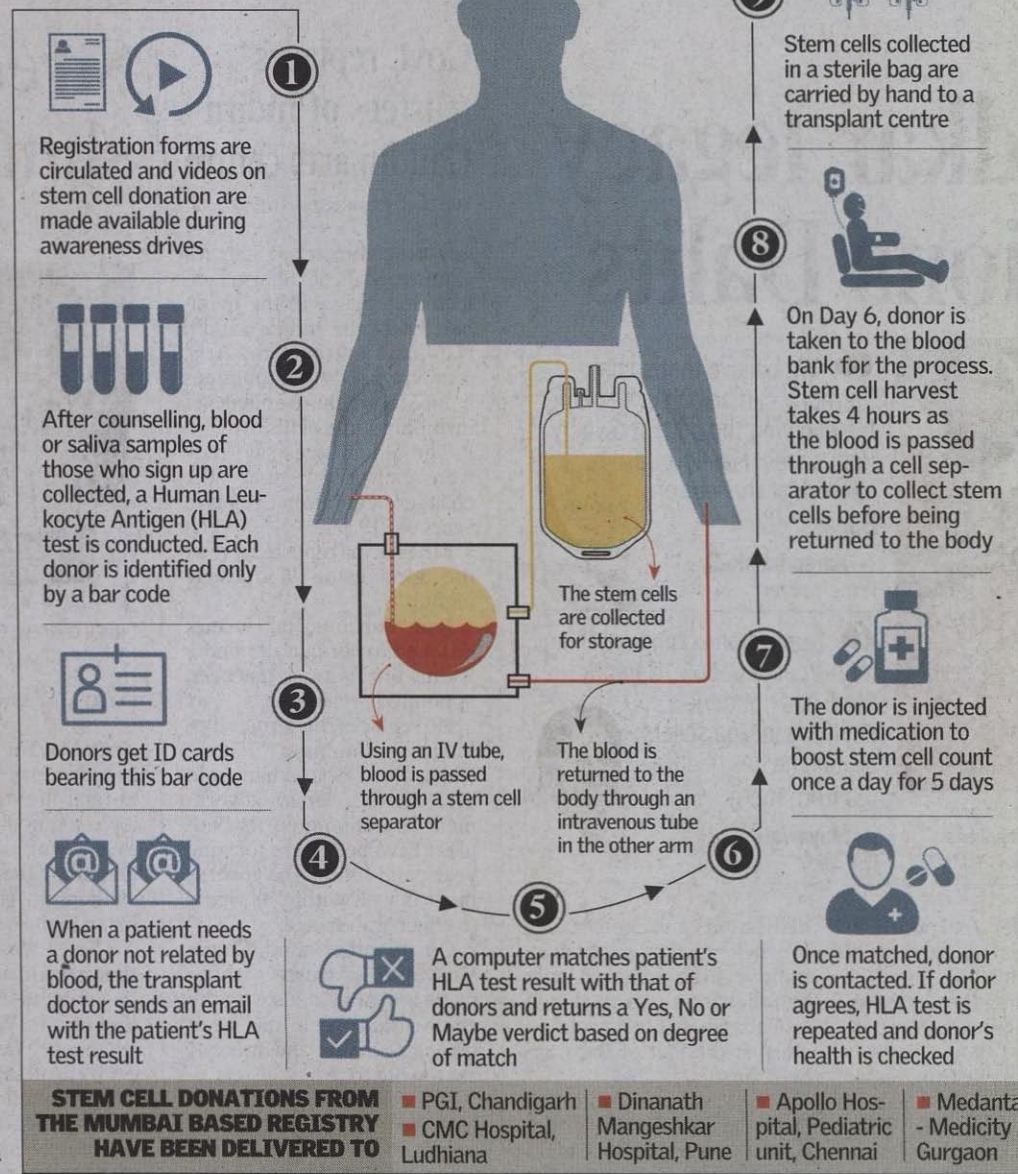
recorded only two donations since its inception in 2009, three back-to-back donations in two months is its best run so far.

And the three donors this year were all girls. "In fact, of the five donations that have been made so far,

four donors have been girls," says Dr Parekh, chairman, MDRI. Of the three girls who donated stem cells this year, one was in Chandigarh when she was contacted and flew down to make the donation. As per global norms on stem cell donations, the identity of the donor and the recipient is kept confidential.

While the year has started on a promising note, the dearth of stem cell donors is a big concern. Though stem cell donation is only a longer, process than blood donation and one that requires a

STEM CELL DONATION: HOW IT WORKS



STEM CELL DONATIONS FROM THE MUMBAI BASED REGISTRY HAVE BEEN DELIVERED TO

PGI, Chandigarh
CMC Hospital, Ludhiana

Dinanath Mangeshkar Hospital, Pune

Apollo Hospital, Pediatric unit, Chennai

Medanta - Medicity, Gurgaon



Of the 5 donations made so far, four donors have been by girls

Dr Sunil Parekh
Chairman, MDRI

doctors in India and abroad could be met. In most other cases, either a match couldn't be found or, in some cases, the donor registered with MDRI didn't agree to donate.

There are around 28 million people registered as stem cell donors worldwide, but the number of Indians in the database is poor and a concern. "Ethnicity plays a role in finding a match. You need people of Indian origin, because the probability of finding a match (in an Indian pool) is high," said Raghu Rajgopal, co-founder and CEO, DATRI blood stem cell donors registry, Chennai. DATRI has 1.25 lakh donors in its database and has facilitated 154 transplants for patients in India and abroad.

An Indian donor also brings down the cost of this hugely expensive procedure. Dr Parekh said India has imported stem cells from countries such as the US and Germany at costs ranging between Rs 10 lakh and Rs 20 lakh, while a local donation including the cost of carrying the stem cells by hand to the transplant facility costs around Rs 6 lakh. Mumbai's presence in the donor registry has been increasing gradually. In 2012, DATRI had facilitated a stem cell donation from a Mumbai donor. Over the next four years, it has recorded 15 stem cell donations. The registry has 10,300 donors in Maharashtra and has facilitated 16 donations from the state.

RIISING HOPE
health

GRAPHIC: SANJAY TAMBE

donor to undergo diagnostic tests and health checks prior to the donation (see box), it hasn't

picked up.

Consider this: while MDRI could facilitate three stem cell

donations in 2016, only three of the 105 requests for donors the registry received from transplant