



Fateh Singh with donor Naval Chaudhary. Fateh's parents are seen in the background | S MANJUNATH

# Tears of joy as boy meets bone marrow donor

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Bengaluru

SIX-year-old Fateh Singh from Amritsar couldn't contain his joy on meeting his newfound friend, 27-year-old Naval Chaudhary, a manager at a city bank, here on Thursday. Naval had donated his bone marrow to Fateh a year ago, becoming the first unrelated bone marrow donor in India.

Fateh was diagnosed with Thalassemia major when he was a little more than a year old. Dr Sunil Bhat, paediatric haemato-oncologist at Mazumdar Shaw Cancer Centre, Narayana Health, said, "Fateh's body produced excess antibodies. Hence, the blood would self-destroy. He passed red urine. The blood from transfusions wouldn't last too long."

"Now that this young man has become the first unrelated bone marrow donor, we hope more people would come forward. Four other bone marrow harvests have been done by the same registry so far," he said.

Only 27,000 potential blood stem cell

donors are registered with DATRI registry in the state. Naval had registered himself with it in 2014 during a campaign that they undertook in the bank.

A teary Harpreet Kaur (38), Fateh's mother, told *Express*, "He needed blood transfusions 10 times a day. We never thought he would require bone marrow. His sister, I and my husband were tested and we were no match. Naval is a godsend."

Harvinder Singh, Fateh's father, said, "His blood type was extremely hard to get. We would travel from Chandigarh to Amritsar at night, get the matching done and get the transfusion."

A modest Naval said, "I researched on bone marrow harvest. I did have a month's discomfort in my back after the



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Harpreet Kaur, Fateh's mother

harvest, but the satisfaction of giving life to a little boy is greater. Also, an unrelated donor is never a match, but I was a match for Fateh."

Ten members of Fateh's family had come down for the meeting between Fateh and Naval. They wanted to personally thank him. "Now we are a family I'm happy to have helped. My family and colleagues have been very supportive," he said.

As per the registry protocol, the identity of donors and recipients is kept anonymous for a year. Now three members of Fateh's family have registered with DATRI and will become voluntary donors if a match is found.

For non-malignant conditions such as Thalassemia, a patient will respond to transplant when the donated cells are harvested from the donor's marrow. The probability of finding a blood stem cell donor is between 1 in 10,000 and 1 in over a million. If a match is found, that donor is probably the only person who can save the patient, Bhat said.