



Six-year-old Fateh Singh with members of his family at his home in Amritsar. PHOTO: VISHAL KUMAR

WONDERFUL FATEH

Amritsar boy first unrelated bone marrow transplant recipient

GS PAUL

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

AMRITSAR, MAY 20

Ask six-year-old Fateh Singh about his superhero and pat comes the reply: "Naval Chaudhary." The two share a unique bond. Amritsar-based Fateh was diagnosed with 'Thalassemia Major' when barely a year-and-a-half-old. During blood transfusion, it was found that his body was unable to produce antibodies and that a stem cell transplant alone could save him. Then began a hunt for the donor and DATRI, the country's largest adult unrelated blood stem cell donors registry in Chennai, was approached.

Naval, 25, a young IT professional from Bengaluru, who had registered himself with DATRI in 2015, received a call, telling him he was a perfect match for a young boy suffering from an acute form of thalassemia. Subsequently, the country's first unrelated bone marrow transplant was conducted by Dr Sunil Bhat, paediatric haemato-oncologist, Mazumdar Shaw Cancer Centre, Bengaluru, in May 2016.

A year later, on May 19, Naval came to Amritsar to meet Fateh. The visit was facilitated by DATRI — as per protocol, the identity of donors and recipients is



The donor, Naval Chaudhary

“Extracting stem cells from a healthy body is a simple procedure. Also, the donor does not run any risk of inconvenience at a later stage in life. People should contribute to make the donors' pool bigger to help save lives. Dr Sunil Bhat, MAZUMDAR SHAW CANCER CENTRE, BENGALURU

kept anonymous for a year.

“When I saw Fateh for the first time, I was overwhelmed and felt an immediate connect. I am lucky to have got an opportunity to save such an adorable child. I can well imagine the agony that his family must have undergone. Initially, I was hesitant to go in for a bone marrow harvesting process. But after counselling by Dr Bhat, I realised that a little effort on my part could save a life. My family too backed me,” said the young techie, who is originally from Malerkotla.

He is concerned that there

is little awareness in Punjab about the registration of one's medical database.

But a beaming Neeta Sethi, Fateh's mother, told *The Tribune* that she and her husband Harwinder Singh had got themselves registered with DATRI. Describing Naval and Dr Bhat as "farishtey (angels)", she said: "Naval is now a part of our family. Of course, I am indebted to DATRI too. Fateh is a wonder kid. His condition was critical but he was always cheerful, despite the painful tests. At one stage, we were all disappointed when reputed institutions like the PGI, Chandigarh, turned us away."

Fateh knew there was something wrong with him, but would always radiate positivity. "My name is Fateh, and I am bound to win," he would claim. After the transplant, he was confined to his house for a year. He spent his time viewing epics on Banda Singh Bahadur and Char Sahibzade and trying to tie the turban all by himself.

He can now lead a normal, healthy life. "During blood transfusion, we discovered his body was unable to produce antibodies and he required blood stem cell transplant. We could cure him with the help of a donor. He is now a ball of energy," said Dr Bhat.

