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| Friday, October 12, 2007 |

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## Third option for stem cell storage

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Delhi-based Cryobanks International India launched its Calcutta operations on Saturday, joining the recent rush for cord blood stem cells storage.

Cord blood stem cells are most commonly used to treat different types of blood cancers, other blood disorders and various inherited disorders. Research into the use of these cells has shown that adult stem cells can also be used to treat autoimmune diseases like lupus, multiple sclerosis, Crohn's disease and rheumatoid arthritis.

Early clinical studies also suggest that they can help avert corneal degeneration and restore vision in cases of blindness; they can help restore proper cardiac function to heart attack sufferers and can improve movement in spinal cord injury patients.

"Calcutta has a large incidence of thalassaemia or Cooley's anaemia, which makes stem cell technology all the more relevant here," Cryobanks International India CEO C.V. Nerikar announced.

The company, a joint-venture between Cryobanks International Inc of the US and RJ Corp, has tied up with AMRI, and is in talks with "other city hospitals". Its stem cells processing and banking facility in Gurgaon offers both private banking and public donation programmes.

LifeCell, Chennai, and Reliance Life Sciences, Mumbai, are the other firms that offer cord blood storage facilities to expecting mothers in the city, with samples being flown out to their labs after childbirth.

CordLife Sciences India, the Indian arm of CordLife, a healthcare company focused on tissue and cord blood banking based in Singapore and Australia, is setting up a cord blood bank in Calcutta, near Joka. The facility, with a capacity to store 200,000 units, is expected to be on stream by the year-end.

"We hope to bring the benefits of cell-based therapies to Calcutta soon. We are setting up a stem cell transplant centre in Delhi next year under the guidance of cardiac surgeon Naresh Trehan, focusing on both cardiac diseases and diabetes," said Mrinalini Chaturvedi, medical director, Cryobanks International India.

The new entrant has pegged its storage fees at Rs 70,000, all-inclusive, for 21 years. "We want to reach out to a wide audience and someone can enrol with us for as low as Rs 8,500 and pay the rest in EMIs," said Nerikar.

A special waiver of 25 per cent will be extended to families with a thalassaemia patient in its fold.

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