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India's first unrelated cord blood transplantation done in Chennai

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CHENNAI: Apollo Hospitals on Thursday claimed it had performed the country's first successful unrelated cord blood transplant on an eight-year-old boy.

Howard, the boy from Uganda, was suffering from *Fanconi Anaemia*, a genetic condition resulting in bone marrow failure which if left untreated could lead to death due to bleeding, infection or leukaemia.

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He was transfused with two matched cord blood units from the US, Ramesh Nimmagada, senior consultant in oncology at Apollo Hospitals, told a press conference.

"This is a milestone in many ways for the Indian medical fraternity," she said.

Doctors had to use two cord units on the boy because of his weight, Revathi Raj, senior consultant in paediatric haematology, said.

"But eventually only one of his two cords will engraft," she said.

Raj said after a period of about six weeks, Howard's blood count has become normal and he is doing well 100 days after the infusion.

"I am feeling good and looking forward to go home and see my brother. When I heard about the transplant I was very scared. But when they did it, I didn't feel anything," Howard said.

The transplant, which would have cost about Rs 4.5 crore in the US, cost only Rs 45 lakh here, Nimmagada said. "Of that, Rs 30 lakh went to the National Marrow Donor Programme (NMDP) for the cords. So the transplant itself was not costly."

In January, Apollo had registered with NMDP in the US to perform unrelated donor searches from India. NMDP has 10 million volunteer bone marrow donors and access to over 50,000 frozen cold blood units.

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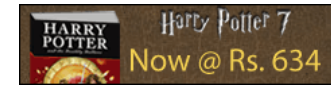
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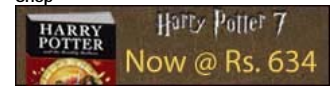
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