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Title : Private operators welcome Singapore's new public cord blood bank
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SINGAPORE : Singapore's two private cord blood banks, CordLife and StemCord, do not see the setting up of the public cord blood bank as competition; in fact, they have given their support to the plan.

Banking the cord blood of newborn babies has been good business for CordLife and StemCord.

They have some 2,500 units of cord blood in their banks, and the numbers are growing.

While Singaporeans are the main customers, the two blood banks also store cord blood for regional clients.

Users pay an upfront fee of up to S\$2,000, and an annual fee of between S\$200 and S\$250.

Both companies are confident their business won't be affected by the public cord blood bank, which offers free storage.

"When you bank your blood for personal use, there is a certain fixed upfront cost but it guarantees you that there will be a compatible match," StemCord chief executive, Dr Ang Peng Tiam, said.

"You have an asset; we are merely banking it for you. As and when you require to use it, we will release the samples back to you for free for your personal use. It's certainly a worthy project to make available cord blood to those who can otherwise not afford to store their own," Dr Ang said.

"With CordLife, the specimens belong legally to the parents of the child or the legal guardian and that means it cannot be used for whatever reason other than what the parents decide to be used for transplantation for the child. So availability is always assured," said CordLife's chief executive Steven Fang.

"The public has a greater choice, greater option in terms of how they wish to put their babies' cord blood to use, whether to bank it for their own use or donate it to the community so that it will be called upon in the need for transplantation. In either case, they are a timely and good development for Singapore."

Cord blood stored in the public bank is open for everyone's use at a fee of S\$26,000.

But if a donor wants to use it later, he or she will get it for free.



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The private banks say the setting up of the public cord blood bank shows the growing importance of cord blood for therapy.

Cord blood is fast replacing bone marrow transplants for patients with leukemia, blood disorders and some cancers, as it is rich in stem cells. - CNA

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