SRI LANKAN CHILDREN WITH THALASSEMIA TREATED THROUGH UNRELATED DONOR BMT

Matching bone marrow cells sourced from across the world

Bangalore, August 11, 2017: Narayana Health City treats four Sri Lankan children suffering from thalassemia major, a life-threatening disorder, through unrelated donor bone marrow transplant. The doctors sourced matching bone marrow cells from unrelated donors from across the world and carried out the transplants at Bone Marrow Transplant Unit at the Mazumdar Shaw Cancer Centre, Narayana Health City. Patients included, 15 months old Nethumi Shenaya Rajapaksha Bomaluwe, 4-year-old Suwini Umeda Shreemali Balasooriya, 5-year-old Purna and 10-year-old Mithun Dilesh Welgamage.

Thalassemia major is a rare genetic blood disorder wherein, the body fails to produce enough red cells and the ones that are formed also die soon resulting in very low haemoglobin levels. These patients need lifelong blood transfusion and lifespan is very short. Sri Lanka faces several challenges while dealing with complex cases, especially those who don’t have any family matched donors for transplant and Narayana Health City offered to help. The common treatment for thalassemia major is blood transfusion. However, the continuous transfusions can cause complications like iron overload and blood- borne infections. Bone marrow transplant is the curative option and hence the families of the four Sri Lankan children decided to opt for this treatment modality.

For Narayana Health City, it was a challenge to meet, as all previous attempts elsewhere to find matching bone marrow donors in the families of these children had failed. Fortunately, the team could find matching donors for all four children. While Suwini and Purna found saviours in Datri Registry (India), the other two found matching donors from German Registry (DKMS) in London.

Elaborating about the treatment, Dr. Sunil Bhat, Senior Consultant and Head of Paediatric Haematology, Oncology and Bone Marrow Transplant at Narayana Health City, said, “Apart from finding human leukocyte antigen (HLA) matched donors for all the 4 children the biggest challenge was to ensure acceptance of the stem cells by the recipient’s system. In unrelated bone marrow transplant, unlike in related donors, the genetic makeup and immune systems in the recipient and the donor are very different. Hence the chances for complications both during and post-transplant are very high. Fortunately, in the case of these children their body responded very positively to the transplant and that has helped us to cure them of thalassemia major. He also pointed out that the chances of finding matched donors are far better from same ethnic background. As
there are no unrelated donor registries in Sri Lanka, finding a donor for them is a challenge”

Over the years, cases such as these have propelled Narayana Health City to be the most sought-after health destination for both national and international patients. With its state-of-the-art facilities and experienced doctors, Narayana Health has not only become a center of excellence for heart problems, which it already has earned a name for, but a leading referral centre for a wide array of treatments including bone marrow transplant.

Sharing his joy, Mr. Jayantha Balasooriya, father of Suwini Umeda Shreemali Balasooriya, who is the Secretary of The Thalassemia Society as well said, “Back home thalassemia major is considered as an incurable disease especially for children who do not have related donors. The children depend on blood transfusion and thereby succumb to fatalities very early in life. Thankfully, we happened to hear about the bone marrow transplant unit at Narayana Health City. We are grateful to Dr. Sunil Bhat and the entire team for not only curing my daughter but also the children of my friends from this dreadful disease.” Mr Balasooriya also emphasised the need for donor registry in Sri Lanka and having such expertise there in order to help more and more patients.

The Bone Marrow Transplant Unit at the Mazumdar Shaw Cancer Centre, Narayana Health City, is recognized world-over as a leading referral centre for both autologous and allogenic stem cell transplant. The unit has completed more than 775 stem cell transplants, including the complex transplants like haploidentical (half matched transplants) and unrelated transplants.

About Narayana Health:
With all super-speciality tertiary care facilities that the medical world offers, Narayana Health is a one-stop healthcare destination for all. Founded by Dr. Devi Shetty and headquartered in Bengaluru, Narayana Health group is the second largest health care provider in the country in terms of operational bed count. The first facility was established with approximately 225 operational beds in year 2000 at NH Health City in Bengaluru. The Company today operates a chain of multispeciality tertiary and primary healthcare facilities across a network of 24 hospitals and 7 heart centres in India and single hospital overseas at Cayman Islands with over 5,600 operational beds across all its centres and potential to reach a capacity of over 6,900 beds (For details, visit www.Narayanahealth.org).

About Narayana Health City, Bengaluru:
NH Health City is located in Bommasandra, Bengaluru, which comprises of Narayana Institute of Cardiac Sciences (NICS), a superspeciality hospital for cardiology and cardiac surgery, and Mazumdar Shaw Medical Center (MSMC), a multispecialty hospital for cancer care, neurology and neurosurgery, nephrology, urology, and houses what we believe, is one of India’s largest bone marrow transplant units. NH Health City operates a stem cell bank.