

City docs voice their support

SHRI PRIYA GOPINATH

DC | CHENNAI

March 14: Eighteen-year-old Nivetha, who could not recognise her parents or respond to her own name a year ago, now smiles feebly when they look over her bed at a city hospital, her eyes following their every movement, after stem cells were injected into her body.

The bright youngster suffered severe brain damage after doctors in Russia, where she had gone to study, allegedly messed up her anaesthesia during a simple appendicitis operation. Flown back to Chennai, Nivetha's father, a clerk in a private company, admitted her to the GH here doctors saw stem cell therapy as the

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only option, even for partial recovery. She was shifted to a private facility where doctors treated her with stem cells harvested from her bone marrow and abdominal fat.

Even as stem cell therapy has come under fire for misleading people with promis-

es of 'miracle cures', some doctors believe the science should not be written off. "Autologous transplant, involving the person's own stem cells harvested from body fat or bone marrow, has proven to be a boon for patients suffering from liver and neurological diseases," says Dr J.S. Rajkumar, chairman, Lifeline Hospitals.

With 500 published clinical trials in stem cell therapy, the hospital has found that about 70 per cent of liver patients and 23 per cent of those with neurological problems have shown 'documented improvement'. "Though the numbers are not very big, it is still exciting, because, at worst, these patients remain the same after therapy," he explains.

In the recent case of 8-year-old thalassemia patient Thamirabharani from Coimbatore, her mother conceived a second time, and the baby boy's cord blood cells were banked and used to treat Thamira, successfully.

"The chance of finding a chord blood stem cell match is 20 times higher than hunting for one in a bone marrow. Given that India's bone marrow registry is yet to take shape, why not use the therapy to save a child's life, especially since treating blood disorders is well within the ICMR guidelines?" reasons Mr Mayur Abhaya, CEO, LifeCell international, predicting that more doctors will bank on stem cells soon.