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Clinical experts ask CDSCO to fast-track approvals for plasma banks to boost CP trials and therapy for COVID-19

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Considering that convalescent plasma (CP) therapy has proved to be successful in faster recovery of patients with moderate symptoms, clinical experts have recommended that the Central Drugs Standard Control organization (CDSCO) needs to fast-track approvals for setting up plasma banks to boost clinical trials and therapy for COVID-19.

According to official sources, plasma banks have been set up in Delhi, Kolkata, Punjab, Rajasthan and Mumbai. CP therapy has gained a lot of prominence in the country amidst growing demand for medicines like remdesivir and tocilizumab among other expensive drugs.

Clinicians strongly recommend CP therapy as a feasible one as plasma can be stored for a year at a temperature of minus 30 degree centigrade. Fresh frozen plasma (FFP) should be stored at temperatures > -30 degree centigrade according to national and international guidelines to maintain the stability of clotting factors and inhibitors.

A plasma bank for treating COVID-19 patients has been set up at Kolkata Medical College and Hospital (KMCH). Delhi government started the country's first plasma bank at the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences (ILBS). Efforts are also on to set up another such bank at Lok Nayak hospital in Delhi. Delhi government's GTB Hospital is also working out on the modalities to start a plasma bank. While the requirement of plasma has been increasing day by day there is a huge gap between demand and supply. In view of this, the Delhi government has made it mandatory for all patients requiring plasma to bring a donor along for replacement.

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A plasma bank collects the blood component from an "eligible" recovered COVID patient. It is later infused in a patient through the convalescent plasma therapy. It helps bringing respiratory rate of a moderate COVID-19 patient into control and increases oxygen saturation rate apart from stabilising various other factors, reducing the stay in ICU and hospital and improving the recovery chances.

In Delhi and Jaipur, it is reported that CP is helping people recover from COVID-19 so much so that doctors from leading institutions in Delhi have also recommended more such patients who have recovered from COVID-19 to come forward for plasma donation as their plasma has potential anti-bodies that can help treat critically ill COVID-19 patients.

According to Dr Narendra Saini, chairman, scientific committee, Delhi Medical Council (DMC), "In China, clinical trials, a dose of 200 ml of CP with the neutralizing antibody titers above 1:640 was transfused to critical patient. There was improvement in clinical symptoms within three days. Radiological examination showed varying degrees of absorption of lung lesions within 7 days.

Talking about efforts of COVID-19 therapy, Ahmedabad based Pharma Consultant Dr Sanjay Agrawal explained, "During the current ongoing COVID-19 outbreak, plasma collected from COVID-19 recovered patients has been prioritized for investigation as one of the treatment modalities. Plasma therapy is more or less like a vaccine as it contains antibodies against the infected disease. There is no need to invest crucial time in searching for other alternatives as CP therapy is the most effective remedy for COVID-19."

"The COVID 19 treatment can be broadly divided into two categories. Either the body of the virus is destroyed or other way is to block the angiotensin converting enzyme 2(ACE-2) a receptor for COVID-19 to enter human cells. If the antibody gets attached to ACE 2 receptor in advance to virus, the virus will not be able to enter the cell. While there is no proven treatment available for COVID-19, the plasma collected from patients in the convalescent phase of infection has been used as an empirical treatment with promising results. One of the most important challenges in plasma therapy was to find a substantial amount of plasma among the recovered patients. Now, new plasma bank will help solve requirement of plasma," explained pharma consultant Anshu Yadav.

The plasma donor has to be a person who has recovered from COVID-19 at least 2 to 3 weeks back and have significant antibody titre and two molecular negative test reports.