



Uganda boy gets India's 1st cord blood transplant

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Chennai: Eight-year-old Howard Khasero from Uganda might have a song on his lips.

He has just been through India's first unrelated cord blood transplant. An exceedingly difficult surgery, but it has saved him from a life-threatening condition.

Says Howard's mother, Sarah Khasero, "I was scared initially, but the doctor was very good and so I was satisfied."

Howard was diagnosed eight months back with Fanconi Anemia, a genetic condition that could result in bone marrow failure, and if left untreated, could kill him.



The same condition had killed Howard's elder brother, and so his family decided to bring him to the Apollo hospital in Chennai.

Since there was no compatible family donor for a stem cell transplant, doctors had to go in for the more difficult umbilical cord blood transplant, where blood from the umbilical cord of a donor, who is not a relative, is transfused into the patient.



Blood from the umbilical cord is rich in stem cells, which can help regenerate new and healthy blood.

After trying unsuccessfully for bone marrow transplants, doctors at Apollo managed to get two matching units of cord blood from the National Marrow Donor Programme (NMDP) in the US, with which the hospital is registered.

The cord blood was injected into Howard's jugular vein. "We had to use two units of cord blood because of the boy's weight, but eventually only one cord would engraft with his system. We knew from the beginning that it would be difficult, and there were times when we lost hope. But today, we are happy because the child is fine," says Senior Consultant in Paediatric Hematology, Dr Revathy Raj.

After 100 days, Howard's blood count is back to normal and he is doing well. He will be flying back to Uganda on Saturday.

The hospital cost Howard's family a tenth of what they would have had to pay in the US. And Howard seems to have been influenced by his doctors in more ways than one.

"I want to be a doctor, because I want to help others," says Howard.