

Stem cell therapy shows light of day to US medico

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Chennai: In February, Shailesh (name changed), a 22-year-old medical student in the US lost his eyesight after swallowing methanol, a toxic alcohol. Doctors there told him that his blindness was irreversible. After stem cell therapy in India, Shailesh will soon fly back to the US to, literally, see his doctors.

He is today able to read and recognise colours. Once back in the US, doctors there will monitor his progress. "I am sure they will be surprised," he said. In his medical reports, doctors had said that he had no chance of regaining vision with or without treatment as his optic nerve had suffered irreversible damage.

Stem cell therapy is still part of clinical trials for ocular diseases in the US, but is not yet

Doctors in the US had said that the 22-yr-old had no chance of regaining vision with or without treatment as his optic nerve had suffered irreversible damage

recommended as a treatment. In India, therapeutic experiments are less restrictive.

On February 24, Shailesh came to Chennai for treatment. He met stem cell therapist Dr Himanshu Bansal of the Institute of Spinal Injury and Stem Cell Research, Rudrapur, and Laksha Hospital in Chennai. The Indian Council of Medical Research has allowed some hospitals to conduct stem cell research.

Doctors injected 120ml of stem cells near the patient's optic nerve. These cells were drawn from his bone marrow. Stem cells have the ability to grow into specialised cells. After the first shot, Shailesh showed improvement, and the procedure was repeated. "These stem cells have managed to regenerate the cells in the optic nerve. He is able to read with glasses now," said Dr Bansal, who will soon present the case for peer review in a medical journal.

Senior ophthalmologists in the city said, if proven, the therapy would be a boon for patients who suffer optic nerve damage due to trauma or diabetes. "But, before being adopted as a therapy, a clinical trial on larger groups of patients should be done," said a senior ophthalmologist.

Stem cells help youth get eyesight

DC CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

March 15: "When I reach the US tomorrow, I will first go to the ophthalmologist and tell her that I can see her," says 22-year-old, bespectacled Shailesh (name changed), the NRI biology student who has regained his eyesight after receiving two injections of bone marrow stem cells in his eyes at a Chennai hospital.

This is the first time in the world stem cell therapy is being used to treat methanol-induced blindness.

methanol

effect

Two months ago, Shailesh had accidentally consumed methanol, a highly toxic form of alcohol that causes irreversible damage to the optic nerve and blindness.

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"Methanol is the main toxin in illicit arrack which

kills hundreds of people in India every year. As little as 10 ml can cause permanent blindness and over 30 ml, causes death," says Dr Himanshu Bansal, an Uttarakhand orthopaedic surgeon who performed the procedure at an inexpensive Chennai hospital.

After pumping the young man with steroids, experts in his hometown, Wisconsin, had written off Shailesh's case. His ophthalmologist, Dr Kara H. Harbick, has stated in her discharge report, "Patient is planning to go to India for treatment. I would not expect any improvement,

with or without intervention."

"I could not digest their underestimation of Indian doctors. I had read that stem cell therapy could be used to rejuvenate dying cell and got in touch with an Indian doctor," said Shailesh.

Dr Bansal flew down to Chennai and used technology from city stem cell bank, Lifecell. Around 120 ml of bone marrow was aspirated from Shailesh's spinal cord and, after concentrating the stem cells, injected back into his eyes. A week later, his vision slowly returned and he was tested to have 6/9 vision.