Keywords: Stem Cell transplant, Umbilical Cord Blood banking; Lymphoma; Pediatric population; Allogenic

Abbreviations: UCB: Umbilical Cord Blood; UCBT: Umbilical Cord Blood Transplant; HLA: Human Leukocyte Antigen; BM: Bone Marrow; PB: Peripheral Blood; GVHD: Graft Versus Host Disease; GVL: Graft Versus Leukemia

Introduction

Umbilical Cord Blood (UCB) Transplant (UCBT)-a treatment made popular in 1988 when the first successful pediatric transplant was performed in Paris with the cells procured from an allogeneic related source [1]. It is now established as a robust alternative when a Human leukocyte antigen (HLA) matched bone marrow (BM) or peripheral blood (PB) donor is unavailable [2]. The prime advantage offered by the biologically naïve cells of UCB is the ability to breach the HLA barrier-to be able to perform transplants with partially HLA-mismatched donors, with acceptable levels of Graft versus host disease (GVHD) and preserved Graft Versus Leukemia (GVL) effect [1]. It is as well postulated that UCB derived stem cells possess an extensive engrafting capacity which exceeds that of BM [3]. This advantage is now extended to adults with superior engraftment and survival owing to double unit UCBT, [3,4] improved patient selection, and better supportive care [3].

As the field of UCBT expanded exponentially a parallel evolution was seen in the system of cord blood banking. There are at least 142 public and 25 private UCB banks the world over with 3 public and 7 private banks located in India [4]. The private banks store approximately 900,000 UCB units as compared to a mere 400,000 units available in the public banks [5], highlighting a great divide. The utility of storage of UCB for autologous use is well recognized by the medical fraternity bringing it much closer to the patients [6]. Currently, the indications for autologous UCBT in the pediatric population are limited to recurrent lymphoma, solid tumors such as neuroblastoma and severe aplastic anemia [6]. The utility of autologous UCBT in the pediatric population is extremely low at 1-3 per million children as is the estimated risk of developing the few indications requiring autologous UCBT in children which is pegged at less than 1 in 50,000 [6].

The usage of UCB is limited, almost exclusively to allogeneic UCBT in the treatment of various malignant and non malignant hematological disorders [6]. Despite a large number of donors registered with various registries across the world [1,3] and many UCB units available in the public banks worldwide, potential transplant recipients in India are unable to find a suitable match in a timely fashion. UCBT in India have been scarce owing to limited availability of UCB units, approximately 5000; [4] in the public domain. The estimated requirement of this genetically diverse population is pegged at 30,000 units [4]. There is a large unmet requirement in India for UCBT despite a high and increasing burden of hematological disorders treatable by UCB. This gives rise to an exorbitant need to make available to the people in India, a large pool of UCB units for allogeneic use at affordable costs.

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