

Ovarian bank gives cancer-hit a ray of hope

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Mumbai: The ordinary ice-box, full of tiny vials, gives no indication of the seriousness of the task. Each vial, indeed, contains a piece of ovarian tissue—and carries hope for Kumud, a 22-year-old, who was recently diagnosed with gastro-intestinal cancer.

On Thursday, Kumud (name changed) became the first to use the ovarian tissue freezing bank, which opened at Lilavati Hospital, Bandra. The man who pioneered this technique seven years back and has used it to help 235 women across the world, Dr Klaus Anderson, was present throughout the operation.

Kumud underwent the operation for a simple reason: cancer treatment is so toxic that at times it damages women's ovaries and makes them sterile. "For a young girl of 25 years, this could be devastating," says Tata Memorial Hospital's medicine department chief Purvish Parikh. With the tissue in storage, Kumud now has a chance of retaining her femininity, says infertility expert Dr Hrishikesh Pai, who runs the ovarian tissue bank at Lilavati. "The technique involves removing one of the two ovaries, dissecting the tissues and freezing them at -200 degree centigrade frozen," he explains.

The ovarian tissue can simply be reintroduced under the abdominal skin, ensuring that the hormones start working all over again, explains Dr Anderson, who hails from Denmark. "Depending on how young the woman was when her tissues were preserved, she will continue to have her monthly cycles for a range of one to three years."

Until recently, young girls undergoing cancer treatment

could only opt for ovum (egg) banking.

"But it is not always possible to put these patients through fertility treatment in order to create eggs and then harvest them. The process would require 15 days or more, which could be a crucial period for a cancer patient," says Dr Reshma Dhillon-Pai, gynaecologist associated with the Lilavati project.

THE LOWDOWN



- Ovarian tissue banking is seven years old
- 235 cancer-hit women have used it across the world
- 35 among them have got the tissue re-implanted
- Three of these 35 women have delivered babies, one each in Belgium, Israel and Denmark

"So, an ovarian tissue banking is a better option for such patients," she adds.

At a future date, this seven-year-old technology of ovarian tissue banking could offer more. Says Dr Nandita Palshetkar, gynaecologist and infertility consultant at the hospital, "It could be used by women who feel that by the time they do get married or are ready to start a family, they will have lost all of their fertile eggs due to the aging process." She believes it will enhance their quality of life when faced with premature menopause or diseases such as osteoporosis.

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