

Convalescent Plasma: Potential Therapy for COVID-19

New Delhi, May 12: Research on convalescent plasma therapy for COVID-19 is set to get a boost with the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) and its public sector enterprise Biotechnology Research Industry Research Council (BIRAC) clearing a proposal from Virchow Biotech Pvt Ltd for support to work on the therapy under DBT's National Biopharma Mission.

DBT and BIRAC had recently announced a COVID-19 Research consortium call to support Diagnostics, Vaccines, Novel Therapeutics, Repurposing of Drugs or any other intervention for control of COVID-19. The first phase of the call closed on 30th March 2020, the review is ongoing. Virchow Biotech had submitted the proposal under the call.

Hyderabad-based Virchow Biotech has been commercially manufacturing intravenous immunoglobulin from human plasma since 2013 in a WHO-approved and dedicated plasma fractionation cGMP facility. Currently, they have the capacity to process over 300,000 litres of plasma annually. They are one of the largest manufacturers of human IVIG and human serum albumin in India.

They are also the first company in India to identify Immunoglobulin Therapy, which can prove to be more promising as compared to direct plasma administration. Direct plasma therapy has several safety, efficacy and specificity concerns. Single transfusion might not be sufficient and transfer of other blood components may pose inadvertent risks. The sterility and specificity of Intravenous Immunoglobulins will help to prevent these risks and keep track of administered dosage.

The proposed immunotherapy procedure already has necessary approvals in place from Drug Controller General of India; Central Drugs Standards Control Organization and funding from Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC). The company plans to start its clinical trials for the same very soon.

The company has proposed to collect plasma from several human convalescent donors, in order to prepare standardized immunoglobulin enriched for anti-COVID antibodies with a specific titer. Immunoglobulin treatment is increasingly recognized to treat a variety of diseases not just because of its ability to fight the infection but also due to its Immunomodulatory and Immunosuppressive activities. In the absence of other proven therapies, it is widely expected that these immunoglobulins will prove crucial in reducing the morbidity from the COVID-19 infection potentially saving valuable human lives.

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