

*Safety First*  
**Jeevan Blood Bank**

# A CATALYST TO LIFE

JEEVAN BLOOD BANK & RESEARCH CENTRE

“Where would you want your blood to come from if you were to meet with an accident on the way home tonight?” This was the question Dr. Saranya put to Dr. P.Srinivasan on New Year's Eve of 1995.

It sometimes takes a hard truth to conceive an idea! It was one such moment!

#### **DR. P. SRINIVASAN**

Dr. P.Srinivasan, was born in Kanchipuram. His father was a professor, mother a home maker. He was brought up in Tuticorin and studied in Tamil medium till high school. He was a brilliant student. He resolved to become a doctor even in his school days after seeing the helplessness of his grandfather, who suffered a heart attack. He came to Chennai and joined Kilpauk Medical College to do his MBBS.

Into his 3rd year of Medicine, Dr. Srini got his stethoscope and the first beats he heard was that of his father. He immediately realized that his father had a hole in the heart. From then on, he started recording heart beats in tape recorders and had a collection of 60 different heart conditions recorded. After his MBBS, he did his MD at the Madras Medical College. Dr. Srini says that his entire Medical education cost him only a couple of thousands and he owes his education to the society.

Dr. Srini, then joined as a full time physician in a hospital in North Madras, started doing his PhD in “Diabetes and Pregnancy”, presented papers in Scotland and also worked there for a few months. This later helped him get a common wealth fellowship and the position as senior Registrar in Scotland. After returning from Scotland at the age of 32, he found that his position was taken up by a junior doctor to whom he had to report. He quit his job and looked to start afresh. That's when four technicians who worked with him in Chennai, encouraged him to start his own lab and thus “Lister Laboratories” was set up in June 1985.



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It was named after the Scottish doctor, Joseph Lister, who advocated laboratory analysis.

Into 5-6 months of operations, a key person left Lister and the replacement came in the form of Dr. Saranya on the 1st of Jan 1986. Dr.Saranya's stint as working partner to Dr.Srini continues into the 30 th year.

#### **DR. SARANYA**

Dr. Saranya was born and brought up in Chennai. She wanted to do botany / zoology or literature but ended up in MMC to do Medicine & fell in love with medicine. Psychiatry or obstetrics was her interest but both were shot down by her husband and father. She went on to do her MS in Microbiology. Out of college, she did not get a job for more than a year. That's when one of her seniors suggested that she try the new lab in Nungambakkam, which was also close to where she lived. She was interviewed by Dr. Srinivasan and offered a job for a princely sum of Rs.750/- a month. At that time, she was the only doctor working for a laboratory. It was the technicians who did most

of the diagnostics in labs, as doctors were considered as an added cost.

Dr. Saranya was a multi tasker and a stickler for order and procedure. Her commitment to quality was quickly recognized by the medical fraternity and over the year she came to be respected for it.

#### **LISTER (1985)**

1986 was when the first HIV case got reported in Vellore. More cases followed soon. Testing for Hepatitus B, C etc were also done.

Lister changed the landscape in diagnostics. It was 100% ethical, focused on technology and was ten steps ahead of the other labs



of its time. It was the only lab at that time to have a Doctor head each of its divisions. It was Dr. Srini's conviction that this was the only way to ensure quality. Soon word got around and Lister Laboratories had celebrities fly in from all over India and other countries to get their blood tested.

The other thing Dr. Saranya took up was counselling persons who tested +ve for HIV. With all the data collected, in 1992-93 Dr. Saranya presented a set of results with some analysis. Her research pointed out that a majority of persons who tested +ve for HIV had a history of heart conditions and have had blood transfusion in the previous one year or so prior to testing.

There was this heart-rending incidence of a HIV +ve child, just 9 months old, who had contracted the virus from her mother. Her mother had renal problems and had contracted the virus during one of the dialysis session from a city hospital. She died a few months after pregnancy but had passed on the virus to her child. When the child exhibited early symptoms of AIDS, her father brought her to Lister to do the testing.

That was the time Dr. Saranya, again brought up the idea of starting a blood bank, to Dr. Srini. But running a blood bank was a big task and it was immediately shot down by Dr. Srini. So things laid low for some time.

There was another incident when a Gujarathi man landed up at Lister. His wife was admitted in the Railway Hospital for a surgery, the next morning and there was a need of O+ve blood. It was August 15, a holiday. So he was having difficulty in getting enough donors. The famous film producer, AVM Saravanan was at that time visiting Lister and he volunteered to reach out to the people of Chennai through his Ham radio. The city responded well and ensured that O+ve blood donors came in to contribute.

#### **JEEVAN BLOOD BANK (1995)**

Access to safe blood should not be a matter of chance. This thought was rattling Dr. Saranya all the time. Her research analysis was crying out, loud and clear that the city

needed an access to safe blood. December 31, 1994 was just another day for Dr. Saranya. She was done for the day and she was leaving the lab. Dr. Srini was making his jottings, sort of an outline as to what he proposed to do the next year, when, Dr. Saranya peeped in and said "Where would you want your blood to come from if you were to meet with an accident on the way home tonight? Just think about it!!"

And those words hit Dr. Srini. After a sleepless night and agonizing 12 hours of introspection, Dr. Srini called up Dr. Saranya at 6 am in the morning and said 'yes' to setting up a Blood bank. It was the first morning of 1995, when the decision to open a blood bank was made and it took exactly 9 months and 24 days to take shape & Jeevan Blood Bank was born on 9th September 1995 as a public charitable trust. The name Jeevan was suggested by AVM Saravanan who became one of the trustees.

Jeevan Blood Bank was the first in India to ensure splitting 100% of the blood into components. Thus a single unit helped more than one patient. It started the first of its kind partnership with Sundaram Medical Foundation. Jeevan took responsibility for the quality of Blood and the hospital just had to store them and use them on need basis. Jeevan Blood Bank was the first blood bank in the country to get ISO certification in 1999 and the first independent blood bank to be certified as compliant with NABH standards in 2010.

Lister was by then on its own growth story and was sold off and both doctors started spending their full time at Jeevan. Jeevan Blood Bank collects blood from over ten thousand donors every year and has established very high standards in blood banking.

In 2005, Jeevan was supporting close to 25-30 Thalassaemia affected children free of cost. The only way forward for Thalassaemia patient was stem cells transplant. The easiest



source for stem cells is the cord blood and 99% of it was being dumped as waste.

**PUBLIC CORD BLOOD CELL BANK (2005)**

It was thus a natural progression for Jeevan to start a public cord blood bank, which it did in 2005. This was a huge step and big responsibility. Thirty thousand units of cord blood was targeted. 6 to 7 years into it, Jeevan managed only about 600. The cord blood initiative had piled up 3 crores of debt and with all their savings reinvested, the founders gave themselves time till end of 2012 to see if any support comes in; else close the cord bank. When December came, Dr. Srini extended this deadline by another three months to 31st March 2013, though there was nothing in the offing.

In February 2013, Dr. Srini received a mail

from ICICI bank. They were willing to support the project. But then how much will that be and how does one service the interest and what about collateral security, were the several questions that ran through Dr. Srini's mind. In any case, he met up with the Bankers and soon found out that, as part of a world bank aided fund there were willing to give Rs.15 crores @ 1% interest, with no collateral and with absolutely no personal guarantee from anyone. Further help came from the Government of Tamil Nadu. A grant of Rs.9 Crores from the Government of Tamil Nadu got approved in April 2013.

Dr. Srini says with conviction "If you believe in doing something, just take the plunge. The means will follow". Of course it takes

a few sacrifices! For a person who was called Sherlock Holmes by his professors, for his special skills in arriving at the correct diagnosis of the ailment by physical examination, he had to give up practicing medicine. He says he doesn't regret his decisions. For some patients, the only chance of a cure is to get a matching cord blood cell transplant. The source from abroad is difficult to match because of the different ethnicity of the people. The cost running into a few million rupees is another factor to find a source closer home. Jeevan as of now stores 3,600 cord blood cells and its target is 30,000, which is good number to get the right match whenever a requirement arises. Jeevan is the only such cord blood bank in the country and receives as many as 10 requests for cord blood every week.

**BONE MARROW REGISTRY (2015)**

Taking fresh guard every 10 years is now a habit for Dr.Srini & Dr.Saranya. Their next initiative is the bone marrow registry, which is a Rs.30 crore project. This is taking shape and Jeevan has received about Rs. 4 Crores funding for this venture from a few institutions and has launched this venture in May 2015.

We need to salute Dr.Srinivasan & Dr.Saranya for their relentless pursuit in setting up a world class institution that forms an important part of the support system that modern medicine and the society needs, to breath fresh life into every Jeevan. In Jeevan Blood Bank, the city of Chennai, has found a true Champion!

**T R GOPALAKRISHNAN**