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SE Asia's largest cord blood bank opens

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INDONESIA has opened its first cord blood bank — the biggest in South-east Asia to date.

Located in Jakarta, this privately run facility is a joint venture between Singapore's leading cord blood banking firm, CordLife, and Indonesian pharmaceutical giant Kalbe Farma, which is the region's largest.

CordLife Singapore is the only AABB- (formerly known as the American Association of Blood Banks) accredited bank in South and South-east Asia.

It is recognised for its efforts in promoting the highest quality in cord blood banking and for enhancing the application of cord blood for stem cell transplants

Such stems cells are commonly used to treat several types of blood cancers, such as acute leukaemia, other blood disorders and various inherited diseases previously considered incurable.

Storing a child's cord blood, which is rich in these stem cells, is increasingly popular worldwide.

It has a number of advantages over stem cells collected later in life, including a lower risk of rejection.

With an annual birth rate of 5 million, Indonesia represents a huge potential source for cord blood. If every baby born in Indonesia stores its cord blood here, the new facility, which can take in 30,000 cord blood units, would be full in three days.

But that will not be the case in Indonesia's highly segmented market. Even for advanced markets such as Singapore, the sign up rate is only about 12 per cent.

And the first-year charge of US\$1,000 (\$1,500) and an annual fee of US\$130 will be beyond the means of most Indonesians.

Still, the number who can afford it are potentially huge, considering Indonesia's population of 240 million.

This was a point the Indonesian Health Minister alluded to recently — stressing that developing countries must stand to benefit from any medical advancement.

Said Dr Siti Fadilah Supari: "We have the market and you have the technology. In reality we are equal. Certainly, a country with high technology should, in stages, transfer it to countries with the market. Without it, you will be sidelined."

Mr Steven Fang, group chief executive officer of CordLife, agreed.

"The next step is to put across or share with them higher level technologies that are used in the area of stem cell transplantation and those can be drawn from other markets which we are working closely with like the United States, Australia and the Netherlands,"he said.

— Channel NewsAsia

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