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Stem cell therapy gives relief to basketball coach

Nashik-based basketball coach Sachin Salve was 19 years old when his limbs began to feel strained and he could not walk or run properly. Over the next few years, the basketball player could not even bend his knees. He later found out that these were early symptoms of Limb Girdle Muscular Dystrophy (LGMD), an incurable disorder that affects the voluntary muscles, mainly the muscles around the pelvic and shoulder region.

Salve did not lose hope despite the fact that muscular dystrophy has no known cure.

He put his faith in a new theory that was doing the rounds in the medical fraternity — stem cell therapy. He opted for it in April and it has not only reduced the pace of his muscle degeneration but now he can perform his day-to-day activities better.

“Earlier, I could not shampoo my hair or even read the newspaper. Being in crowded and narrow areas scared me because I would lose my balance,” said Salve.

But on Friday, he was able to travel by bus alone from Nashik to Mumbai for his monthly appointment.

LGMD is caused when certain proteins in the muscles are missing or malfunctioning and this leads to muscle degeneration. The stem cells, which were injected into the fluid around Salve’s spinal cord and affected muscles, took the form of the missing proteins and slowed down the rate of muscle degeneration.

“Before the therapy, I would tire after four hours on the field, now I can go on for 12 hours at a stretch,” said the coach proudly as 14 children trained under him were selected for the state team this year. Out of the 14, one made it to the national team. All the teams he coached have won local and district-level tournaments.

The stem cell therapy is followed up by physiotherapy and occupational therapy to help rehabilitate patients. “Since he is a basketball coach, most of his exercises included throwing a ball. These exercises help mobilise the stem cells to areas where they are most needed and yields better results,” said Dr Nandini Gokulchandran, head, clinical research at Neurogen, a clinic in Chembur.

For Salve, who used to avoid award ceremonies out of the fear of climbing the steps to the stage, the therapy has brought in a new

bounce in his step.

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