

Panel to find out if plasma therapy led to mutations

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Nagpur: Divisional commissioner Sanjeev Kumar has formed a three-member expert committee to conduct a retrospective study on plasma therapy which shall entail genome sequencing of samples of Covid patients who were covered under 'Project Platina' conducted at Government Medical College and Nagpur (GMCH).



The panel would be looking for possible mutations in the novel coronavirus in samples of plasma recipients which were collected on the first, seventh and 14th day. This is to retrospectively understand if any spontaneous mutations were taking place during the plasma therapy.

The medical college had led the state-level project in which nearly 500 patients received the convalescent plasma to assess its efficacy in treating critically-ill Covid patients last year. The project was abandoned after it was found that the therapy doesn't have any mortality benefit.

The ICMR's PLACID trial too had found no benefit of convalescent plasma to patients. Recently, the ICMR dropped plasma therapy from its Covid treat-



Dr K Khairnar, head of environ virology at CSIR-Neeri, will head the panel. Virologist major (retd) Dr M Bhursundi and pulmonologist Dr R Sarnaik are the other members

ment guidelines.

Following the Nagpur bench of Bombay high court order on May 12, the expert panel was formed to study whether plasma therapy led to acceleration of Covid-19 cases in the city.

The panel is led by Dr Krishna Khairnar, head of environmental virology at CSIR-Neeri, Nagpur. Virologist major (retd) Dr Milind Bhursundi, and pulmonologist Dr Ravindra Sarnaik are the other two members.

Neeri director S Chandrashekhar did not comment on the development citing court's order.

In his letter dated May 21, the divisional commissioner directed GMCH dean Dr

Sudhir Gupta to provide samples collected in the Platina trial to CSIR-Neeri lab for conducting the genome sequencing.

The HC seeking CSIR-Neeri lab's expertise comes in the backdrop of the facility already being part of Indian SARS-CoV2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) on SARS-Cov2 genome sequencing.

As per the government of India project, the CSIR-Neeri lab had already found double mutant B.1.617 (including B.1.617.1 and B.1.617.2) as 'dominant variant' in the samples investigated for the Nagpur region.

TOI has learnt from administrative officials that the CSIR-Neeri study led by Dr Khairnar has already been conducting genomic sequencing of samples received from RPTS swab collection centre from November 2020 to May 2021.

The study has been done in collaboration with CSIR-CCMB Hyderabad under the aegis of INSACOG. Under the study, it has been found the variant B.1.617 (double mutant) is prevalent in over 70% positive patients.

This variant was reported in samples in the last week of January 2021, in the study conducted by CSIR-Neeri for Nagpur region.

Whether the new variant is associated with higher mortalities needs to be further investigated, administrative officials said.