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Hope for Down syndrome victims?

Jaipur, June 30 (IANS) Just one extra chromosome can blight a life, because it leads to Down syndrome, the commonest cause of mental retardation and malformation among newborns. There is no treatment. But now there may be.

City paediatrician Sunil Gupta has after 20 years' research claims to have found a new way to treat Down syndrome victims - treat the 'disturbed' cells in the human body and increase the proportion of 'perfect' cells.

Gupta combines modern medicine with traditional Indian methods in his treatment. So far he has treated over 300 Down syndrome patients in the age group 1-28. The patients come from all parts of India.

According to Gupta, there are three types of cells in the human body - perfect cells, damaged cells and some cells in a disturbed condition. 'I just work on those disturbed cells. I try to get them to work properly and increase the number of perfect cells in the body.'

Down syndrome occurs in about one out of every 800-1,000 births. It affects boys and girls equally. It is caused by the presence of 47 chromosomes in the newborn, instead of the usual 46.

Almost all parents who hear their newborn child has Down syndrome are devastated. Take the case of the Mathurs here (name changed to protect identity).

For 15 years the Mathurs had to see their only son live like a vegetable, completely dependent on them. But the condition of the boy has improved considerably after treatment by Gupta. He has even passed an examination for tabla players from a school of classical music.

Now the parents can plan a future for the boy.

'We are looking for an instructor who can help him establish some business,' says the father. 'We will try to set up a factory for him.'

The mother says: 'Now I've started dreaming about my daughter-in-law. As he is doing well and he is caring too, I'll get him married as soon he turns adult.'

Gupta says: 'The number of mentally retarded children in India has crossed the five million mark. Their rehabilitation is going to remain a challenge unless the government and voluntary agencies make concerted efforts. These children need treatment and they need help so that they can become self-reliant.'

The paediatrician faced a problem when he tried to patent the medicine he uses.

'I wanted to get my herbal formula patented in India, but the patent unit of CSIR (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research) said it could not be done in India. I cannot go to the US to

get my formula patented. That is so expensive.'

But now an American pharmaceutical company will market Gupta's composition.

'I have just signed an agreement with an American company called Nutrivene, which will market a nutritional supplement composed on the basis of my herbal formula for retarded children and Down syndrome victims,' he said.