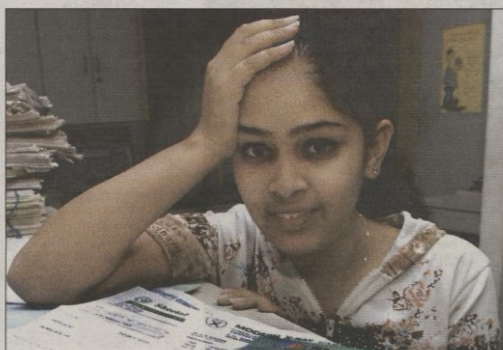


MidDay

HOW I TURNED FROM NORMAL TO ANAEMIC IN A DAY

MID DAY REPORTER NAVDEEP KAUR MARWAH GOT HER HAEMOGLOBIN CHECKED AT FOUR DIFFERENT LABS AND GOT VARIED RESULTS. SANS A REGULATOR, DIAGNOSTIC LABS ARE PLAYING HAVOC WITH PEOPLE'S HEALTH



Tracking the bloodline: The reporter with her test reports from four different laboratories
PIC/RAJEEV TYAGI

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IT was a strange case of detecting an 'ailment' and getting 'cured' almost overnight. A random blood test pronounced I was anaemic. I looked healthy and there were no symptoms that suggested otherwise, but according to a test report from Banwari Lal Charitable Clinical Laboratory at Rani Jhansi Road, my Hb (haemoglobin) level was at an unhealthy 10 gm/dl.

Armed with the report, I visited my family doctor who refused to agree with the result. "It's (the Hb) much more than that," he said checking my nails and eyes. "Get it done (the test) somewhere else," he suggested.

How is anaemia diagnosed?

Very few tests are needed to diagnose anaemia. The main test is a full blood count. This is a blood test that looks at the number, size and shape of red blood cells. The doctor may also measure iron, vitamin B12 and folic acid levels. If anaemia is diagnosed and there is no obvious cause, your doctor may suggest you have an x-ray to ensure there is no internal bleeding.

I was shocked. But following my doctor's advice, I went to Star Imaging & Path Lab at Tilak Nagar. The result boosted the number of oxygen transporters in my body to a healthy 13.1 gm/dl.

My anaemia seemed to have been 'cured' but my curiosity had been piqued. What if even the Star Lab had got it wrong? I decided to run a reality check.

My next stop was Sheetal Diagnostic Centre at Block B-3, Janak Puri. I fared a little better than what I did at Banwari Lal Lab. The result: 11.5 gm/dl.

Three labs tried and my confusion had only increased. I decided to go for a final test.

Modern X-Ray Clinic in Guru Nanak Pura, Jail Road, gave a completely new reading — 12.20 gm/dl.

I was aghast. Having suffered four pricks in my arms and after spending several hundreds of rupees I was left with four reports with different values. I wondered on what basis would my doctor decide the state of my health. I thanked my stars that I didn't suffer from any serious medical condition. But what if I was on an operation table and my blood sugar reading was flawed?

Dr Ajit Singh Ghai, a physician, said, "It's quite

surprising. It puts in the dock the authenticity of the medical diagnostic labs."

Agreed Dr Tarun Sahni, senior consultant, Internal Medicine, Indraprastha Apollo Hospital. "There is no standardisation as far as pathological labs are concerned. Wrong test results can cause havoc. A patient of mine was declared HIV+ by a certain lab. When she was tested again she came out HIV negative. A doctor must correlate pathological reports clinically before prescribing treatment."

Doctors blame the absence of a government regulator. "Diagnostic labs have mushroomed all over the country. One should always get the tests done at certified and authorised labs. Wrong reports can lead to either under diagnosis or over diagnosis — both of which are dangerous," said Dr Rommel Tickoo, consultant, Internal Medicine, Max Healthcare.

Dr Surender Kumar, chairman, Department of Endocrinology, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, asserted doctors know patients beyond a lab test. "For us the patient is the primary indicator, not the lab report. The doctor takes a final decision based on varied factors and the report is just one of them."

HOW IS ANAEMIA TREATED?

THE TREATMENT you receive will depend greatly on the cause of anaemia. Treatment is usually simple and may be resolved with an improved diet or by taking supplements. If the cause of your anaemia is vitamin B12 deficiency then your doctor may prescribe vitamin B12 injections. These injections will need to be given every 3 months, usually throughout the patient's life. It is also possible to have iron injections but this is not often necessary. If your anaemia has been caused by internal bleeding eg ulcers then medicines or surgery may be required. If anaemia is severe then you may also need a blood transfusion.