

First skin culture centre in Airoli

Sumitra Deb Roy

The city will have its own skin culture centre in March.

The skin research laboratory inside the National Burns Centre at Airoli will be the first in the county to clinically use skin culture.

The technique is used in western countries to cure patients with burn injuries. People with more than 40% burns are at a high risk of losing their lives or contracting some fatal infection because the skin barrier breaks down.

In most cases the recipient's body refuses the donor skin. Also, using a donor's skin to heal burn injuries increases the chances of infection.

"Skin culture will help us use the patient's skin on his own body," Dr Sunil Keswani, plastic, cosmetic and burns surgeon of the National Burns Centre, said. Mumbai sees more than 10,000 burn cases every year. "We will take a

Skin-deep

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small patch of skin from the patient and develop it using the Keratinocyte culture (growing of cells of the skin's outer layer)."

The doctor said that the skin would develop in about three weeks. "And the best part is that it will permanently stick to the patient's body unlike an artificial skin that has to be taken off after some time," he said. A 1x1-inch skin patch can grow up to 6x6-inch after the skin culture.

Maharashtra's only skin culture

centre, till now, is in Pune. It is impractical to transport a burn patient's own skin there for culturing. "Now, with a centre inside a hospital, chances of the skin patch getting infected is almost nil," Keswani said. It would dramatically bring down the cost of skin culture as well. And a patient would not have to spend more a month in hospital, he said.

The skin culture is also expected to bring down the demand for skin because donors are few. The oldest skin bank in the city at Sion has received 47 donations in 2007 and 17 in 2008. There were hardly any donations in the past six years.

"The awareness is increasing but it is too little to meet the demands of even our own hospital," Dr Madhuri Gore, chief of burns unit at LTMG hospital, said. The hospital treats more than 700 burn patients a year.