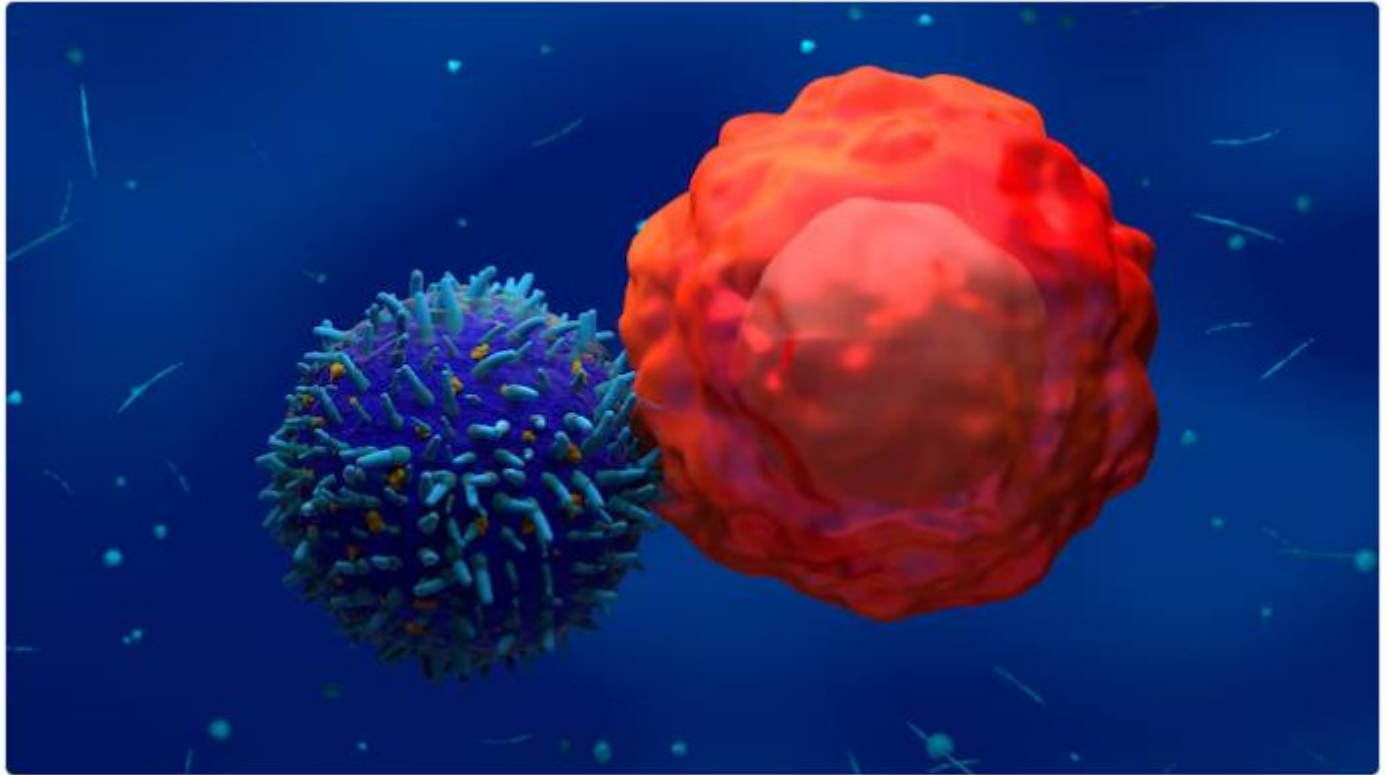


India approves living drug to treat blood cancer: All about Qartemi and how it works

The second CAR-T cell therapy, Qartemi, has been approved by India's drug regulator. Qartemi is a "living drug" for blood cancer patients.



Qartemi is a personalised CAR-T cell therapy for blood cancer patients. (Photo: Getty Images)

In Short

- Qartemi is India's second CAR-T cell therapy for blood cancer
- It is a personalised "living drug" for advanced or relapsed stages
- The therapy genetically engineers the patient's cells to attack cancer cells

A "living drug" has been approved for blood cancer patients in India who suffer from an advanced or relapsed stage of the disease. Immuneel Therapeutics, a Bengaluru-based biotech startup, has launched Qartemi, a CAR-T cell therapy for patients with B-cell Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma (B-NHL).

The drug is the second CAR-T cell therapy approved in India, after the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) gave a nod to the homegrown NexCAR19, developed by ImmunoAct, a company incubated at the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (IITB) and Tata Memorial Hospital.

A "living drug" is different from a traditional chemical drug, made from cells to have a long-lasting immune response. These drugs are cell therapy which remove from the patient, modified, and then infused back into the patient. It is called CAR-T cell therapy which is a type of immunotherapy, genetically engineering the patient's T cells to attack cancer cells.

Qartemi is a personalised Chimeric Antigen Receptor or CAR-T cell for adult patients with relapsed or refractory B-NHL is now available locally.

India faces a rising burden of blood cancers, with around 1,20,000 new cases and over 70,000 deaths annually from leukemia, lymphoma, and multiple myeloma. With this, Qartemi offers hope to patients for whom conventional therapies, including chemotherapy, prove ineffective.

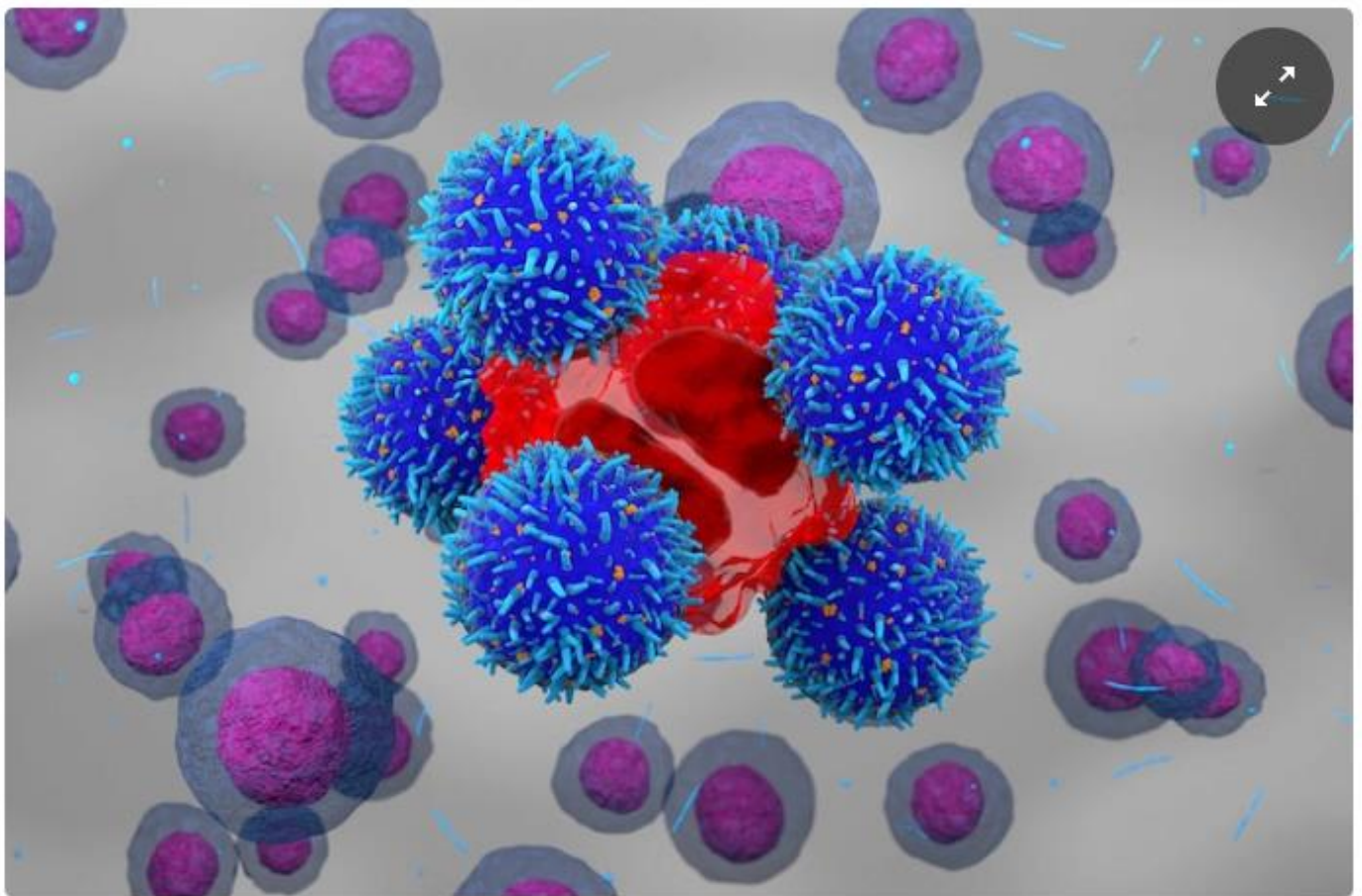
The company that developed the drug is a gene and cell therapy startup backed by Biocon founder Kiran Mazumdar Shaw and oncologist and author Dr Siddhartha Mukherjee.

"By offering Qartemi at a significantly accessible price compared to global alternatives, we are proud to develop this therapy indigenously at our facility in Bangalore to ensure global standards of safety and efficacy," Amit Mookim, CEO, Immuneel Therapeutics, said in a statement.

The therapy during treatment, is priced between Rs 35 lakh to Rs 50 lakh, which the company said is significantly more affordable compared to similar global options.

In 2022, the company launched the CAR T-cell therapy trials, which focused on Qartemi, designed for patients with relapsed or refractory B-cell malignancies. Since such patients had limited treatment during relapse or in a refractory (not responding to drugs) stage.

The trials, called IMAGINE, were conducted at three leading medical institutions: Narayana Hospital in Bengaluru, Apollo Cancer Hospital in Chennai, and PGIMER in Chandigarh.



A "living drug" different from a traditional chemical drug, made from cells to have a long-lasting immune response. (Photo: Getty Images)

The results of the IMAGINE trial showed that Qartemi was safe and effective, comparable to CAR-T cell therapies approved by the US Food and Drugs Administration (FDA). The phase 2 clinical trials were supported by the Department of Biotechnology's Agency, BIRAC through its Biotechnology Industry Partnership Programme (BIPP) scheme.

In the Phase 2 trial, the drug achieved an 83.3% overall response rate.

The company has partnered with several hospitals, including Narayana Health, Apollo Hospitals, CMC Vellore & Ludhiana, Manipal Hospitals, RGCIRC Delhi, SGPGI Lucknow, Amrita Hospital Faridabad, HOC Vedanta Ahmedabad, Cytecure Bangalore, Sparsh Bangalore, Marengo Asia Hospitals among others, to provide Qartemi to their patients.

Qartemi, known as "India's first international CAR T-cell therapy," has been licensed from Hospital Clinic de Barcelona (HCB), a globally renowned institution at the forefront of cell therapy innovation.

News Source

<https://www.indiatoday.in/health/story/india-approved-cdsco-living-drug-car-t-cell-therapy-blood-cancer-qartemi-2669412-2025-01-24>