



Stem Cell Therapy for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

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In News: The Supreme Court of India has categorically prohibited medical practitioners from offering **stem cell therapy (SCT)** as a treatment for **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**, citing lack of proven efficacy, safety concerns, and ethical violations.

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

- A **neurological and developmental disorder**.
- Affects:
- Communication,
- Social interaction,
- Learning,
- Behaviour patterns.

What is Stem Cell Therapy (SCT)?

1Uses **stem cells** to treat diseases by **regenerating or repairing tissues**.

2Stem cells can self-renew and differentiate into specialized cell types.

3Standard, approved uses (ICMR 2021):

o**Hematological disorders:** Leukemia, Lymphoma

o**Neurodegenerative disorders:** Parkinson's Disease (limited, research stage)

4Advantages: Potential for targeted treatment, tissue regeneration, and addressing diseases with limited conventional therapies.

Ethical and Legal Concerns in Using SCT for ASD

Issue

Explanation

Lack of Proven Efficacy

No scientifically validated evidence supports SCT for ASD; not recommended by **ICMR** or **NMC**.

Unethical Commercial Use

Offering SCT as routine therapy violates **medical ethics** (Bolam test) and exploits patient vulnerability.

Consent Limitations

Patient autonomy (Article 21) does **not extend** to unproven, unsafe treatments.

Research-only Use

SCT permitted **only in approved clinical trials** with regulatory and ethical oversight.

Professional Misconduct

Promotion or advertisement of SCT for ASD amounts to **professional misconduct under NMC norms**.

Significance of the Judgment

1Protects patients from **unsafe, unproven therapies**.

2Reinforces **ethical standards and professional accountability** in medical practice.

3Aligns with **constitutional right to health** under **Article 21** while balancing scientific prudence.

4Clarifies the distinction between **research-only interventions** and approved treatments.