
Good News Department

Providing Hope For Young Sickle Cell Patients

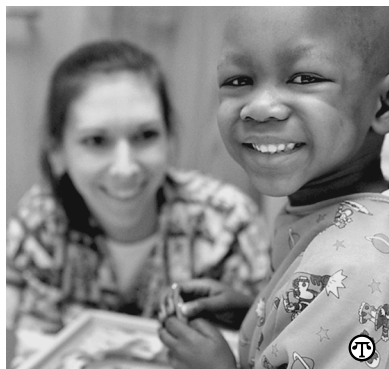
(NAPSA)—There's encouraging news for the more than 80,000 Americans who suffer from sickle cell disease, the most common, life-threatening, inherited blood disorder in the nation: The success rate of sickle cell treatment is way up.

With success rates exceeding the national average, the Aflac Cancer Center and Blood Disorders Service of Children's Healthcare of Atlanta treats more than 1,500 children with the disease and has performed more blood and marrow transplants for this disease than any other program in the country. This includes the first successful, unrelated cord blood transplant for sickle cell disease, as well as the greatest number of matched related transplants performed nationwide. Ninety-five percent of sickle cell disease cases affect African Americans.

Children with the condition produce very sticky cells that prohibit oxygen from being transported to different parts of the body, which can cause bone and blood damage. Chemotherapy is used to eliminate the bone marrow that produces the sickle cells, then replaces it with healthy bone marrow from a sibling or matched donor. This procedure is usually considered only for children with severe disease.

The dedicated research team, which is predominantly made up of African-American females, is exploring new approaches to transplants that may make the procedure available to more children in the future.

"We offer care to our patients that is geared towards early detection, health maintenance and education in the treatment for potential complications," stated Dr. Ifeyinwa Osunkwo, M.D.,



Aflac Cancer Center Child Life Specialist entertains sickle cell patient during hospital stay.

MPH member of the Aflac Cancer Center research team. "An avid involvement of our patients in research studies provides them with access to cutting-edge therapies. It is this partnership between us that will continue to help break the sickle cycle."

The Aflac Cancer Center also provides public, medical community and employee educational activities throughout the year for sickle cell disease awareness.

As important as making the most of cutting-edge research available is the hospital's dedication to supporting the families of patients. For children with sickle cell disease and those recovering from bone marrow transplants, supportive families and hospital staff are key. A team of experts provides medical care along with physical, emotional, mental and spiritual support to patients and their families.

Currently, Aflac employees and sales force donate time and funds to the Aflac Cancer Center. The company has contributed over \$36 million to pediatric cancer research and treatment.

For more information, including learning about volunteer services, visit www.aflaccancercenter.org.