Rare Platelet Disorder Doesn't Stop NASA Scientist From Traveling the Globe

(NAPSA)—In 1972, Ted Gull flew in what were then experimental, high altitude flights with Apollo astronauts in preparation for the modern day Space Shuttle. Throughout his career, he has been credited with innovative thinking and groundbreaking research that helped shape the United States' contemporary space exploration program. But in the winter of 1994, Ted's career was grounded when he came face to face with a rare platelet disorder, unheard of by the general public and dismissed by some physicians.

"It all started during the holiday season when I just couldn't shake the flu. Next thing I knew, I noticed deep purple bruises on my body and persistent nose bleeds that never seemed to end," said Gull when asked about his long road to proper diagnosis and treatment.

After visiting several physicians and undergoing extensive testing, Ted was diagnosed with a rare autoimmune disorder called Idiopathic Thrombocytopenic Purpura (ITP). The disorder affects both men and women, children and adults, and is characterized by low blood platelet counts that can lead to life-threatening bleeding episodes. ITP occurs when the immune system malfunctions and produces antibodies against its own platelets, which are needed for normal blood clotting. These antibodies destroy the platelets, resulting in a decreased blood platelet level. The disorder becomes life-threatening if a patient's platelet count becomes so low that brain hemorrhaging occurs. Exact causes of ITP are unknown.

"A normal platelet count ranges from 150,000 to about 400,000 platelets/mL of blood. My count was nearly undetectable! I could have bled to death at any moment," said Gull.

After trying several different medications, Gull's platelet count failed to rise to a manageable, safe level. He was referred to a hematologist at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Md. The hematologist suggested Ted receive an infusion of immunoglobulin intravenous (IGIV) therapy called Gamimune® N 10%, Immune Globulin Intravenous (Human), manufactured by Bayer Biological Products (BP). It worked immediately, so the doctor prescribed a regular treatment regimen of Gamimune® N to keep Gull's platelet count within a safe range.

Ted Gull, and his wife Connie, now have the freedom to travel. Pictured here on a recent trip.

What Is IGIV?

IGIV is a lifesaving therapy that contains antibodies purified from the donated blood plasma of thousands of people. IGIVs are used to treat a variety of health problems, and can be used for either immune replacement or immune modulation. In ITP, IGIV acts as an immune modulator, regulating the platelet count.

"More than 150,000 people in the United States have ITP. Many people never experience any symptoms until later in life, yet other people have symptoms their entire life," said Joan Young, president of the Platelet Disorder Support Association (PDSA). IGIV is an effective therapy for people with this rare disease that can help raise a patient's platelet count."

At first, Ted and his wife, Connie, would trek each week to Johns Hopkins to get his infusion of Gamimune® N. But Connie learned that she could administer the treatment at home since she was a registered nurse. "Getting infused at home opened up my world again, allowing me and my wife to travel the globe like we did before I was diagnosed. Not since my early days at NASA had I felt like I had the entire galaxy at my disposal," said Gull.

In fact, Ted and Connie decided to pack their bags (and their IGIV) and go to Hawaii for their 30th wedding anniversary. The couple has also visited Sweden on a number of occasions where Ted has been able to get back to his career and work with Swedish physicists, while Connie sightsees and helps Ted with his infusions.

"I am forever thankful for the thousands of people whose plasma it takes to manufacture IGIV. You just can't imagine how it has changed my life," Gull reflects.

Today, Ted and Connie are working to get back to the normal lifestyle they knew before diagnosis of ITP.

Ted recently went through a procedure at Johns Hopkins to have his spleen removed and as a result, his platelet level reached a nearly normal level.

In the meantime, Bayer BP launched their next generation IGIV, Gamunex® - Immune Globulin Intravenous (Human), 10% Caprylate/Chromatography Purified, backed by the largest, most robust clinical trials in IGIV history.

Diagnosing ITP

To diagnose Idiopathic Thrombocytopenic Purpura, a doctor conducts a few routine procedures, including a family history check, a physical examination, and a blood platelet level test. People suspecting they may have ITP should consult with a physician. With early diagnosis and proper treatment, people with ITP keep their blood platelet level at a manageable, safe level.

For more information, consult your physician, or visit the Platelet Disorder Support Association at www.pdsa.org, or Bayer at www.gamunex.com.

The most common side effects with Gamunex® noted during clinical trials included: headache, vomiting, fever, nausea, rash, and back pain. For additional information, see Full Prescribing Information at www.gamunex.com.