



Health News And Notes

Cord Blood Banking: A Lifesaving Decision

by *Rallie McAllister, M.D.*

(NPSA)—Expecting couples face dozens of important decisions—one of the most critical is whether to save their baby's umbilical cord blood. They'll only have one opportunity to do it: in the moments following their baby's birth.

Umbilical cord blood is a rich source of stem cells, which are considered to be the master cells of the body. For more than two decades, cord blood stem cells have been used in transplant medicine to treat a wide variety of serious diseases, including leukemia and other cancers and blood, immune and metabolic disorders.

One of the most promising areas of stem cell research is regenerative medicine, in which an individual's own stem cells are used to repair damaged or diseased tissues and organs.

Clinical trials are now under way to evaluate the benefits of using a child's cord blood stem cells in the treatment of type 1 diabetes, hearing loss, cerebral palsy and other brain injuries.

"When cord blood cells are used to treat an illness, they're simply administered to the individual intravenously, like a blood transfusion," said obstetrician-gynecologist Marra Francis, M.D. Once in the body, stem cells can trigger natural repair processes by reducing inflammation and increasing blood flow to injured or diseased areas.



Saving a baby's cord blood can mean better health for the whole family.

Parents may choose to donate their baby's cord blood to a public bank or store it in a private banking facility, but most times, it's discarded as medical waste.

Donation to public banks is free but the cord blood is not reserved for the family's exclusive use. Parents who want to ensure that their baby's cord blood will be available for their family's future use can choose to store it with a private cord-blood bank.

In many cases, interest-free payment plans and gift registries are available at private cord-blood banks.

For more information, visit www.cordblood.com.

• *Dr. McAllister is the cofounder of MommyMDGuides.com and the co-author of "The Mommy MD Guide to Pregnancy and Birth" and "The Mommy MD Guide to Your Baby's First Year," which all feature tips that doctors who are also mothers use for their own families.*