



MUM CAMPAIGNS FOR IT TO BE COLLECTED SO VITAL

STEM CELLS CAN BE HARVESTED

Umbilical cord blood gets thrown away but it gave my son extra year of life



CRUSADER... Fiona with Charlie, left, and Joe, Ellie Louise and newborn baby Sienna



By HELEN GILBERT

ALMOST 83,000 litres of precious umbilical cord blood were just thrown away last year.

Yet it is rich in potentially life-saving stem cells. At present cord blood is not routinely collected by the NHS. But if just 30,000 cord blood units are saved every year in the UK, 80 per cent of live-saving transplant requests could be met. Clinical support worker Fiona Harris-Beard, 32, and husband Joe, 32, are campaigning for change. They lost toddler son Charlie to leukaemia when he was two, but Fiona says a stem cell transfusion extended his life by a year. "Many women are unaware that they can donate blood from their placenta and umbilical cord," the mum of Ellie Louise, 14, and Sienna, 12 weeks told Me. "But just one cord can save a life." Doctors had been unable to find a bone marrow match for Charlie, who was battling acute myeloid leukaemia (AML). They suggested to Fiona, from Kidderminster, Worcs, a stem cell

- STEM cells in umbilical cord blood can be used to treat such conditions as cerebral palsy, sickle cell disease and leukaemia.
- Stem cells serve as a repair mechanism – replacing diseased cells with healthy new ones.
- Stem cell transplants

WHAT ARE STEM CELLS? treat people whose stem cells have been damaged by disease. They can help your body to make healthy red and white blood cells or platelets.

- Obtaining stem cells from the umbilical cord is simpler than taking from bone marrow, which involves a painful medical procedure.
- Cord tissue stem cells are being studied for their ability to form bone cartilage, nerve and skin cells.

Trials are evaluating them for the treatment of conditions such as multiple sclerosis, diabetes and Parkinson's disease.

- Stem cell procedures are also used in the beauty industry for facelifts, breast augmentation and vaginal rejuvenation.

"Those with rare tissue types may find it difficult to find a match on the bone marrow register. Cord blood can offer them a lifeline." Guy Parkes, of NHS Blood and Transplant, said: "Cord blood donation is a great way to help save lives with a product that is normally discarded." The campaign has attracted support from celebrities including actress Linda Robson, who said: "Fiona and Joe have made sure Charlie's memory lives on." Charlie's journey has inspired his sister Ellie Louise to train as a midwife when she leaves school. Fiona added: "Just one cord has the potential to save a life."

HOW YOU CAN HELP NHS cord blood collection sites are based at the following hospitals: Barnet General, Northwick Park in Harrow, Luton and Dunstable, Watford General, and St George's and University College, both in London. There are also eight Anthony Nolan cord blood collection centres across the country.

transplant using blood taken from an umbilical cord. Eight months later, though, the cancer tragically returned. The brave toddler managed to make an appearance as best man at his parents' wedding in December 2012 but died two months later.

'Nurses are unaware' Just a month later, Fiona set up charity Cords4Life to raise awareness about umbilical cord blood donation. Fiona has also raised £100,000 to support families who need to travel for cord banks.

Currently expectant mothers can only donate their cords at 14 hospitals across the UK – at six NHS cord blood banks and eight blood cancer charity Anthony Nolan centres. An Anthony Nolan spokeswoman said: "Regulations prevent

us from sending kits to other hospitals or for home births to facilitate a collection." But a Department of Health spokesman said collection sites were located at hospitals in areas of highest ethnic diversity. Fiona wants to see cord blood banks open in every NHS hospital alongside the routine collection of cord blood. But until then, Fiona says her aim is "to make existing cord banks more accessible and raise awareness." "Mums have the potential to save lives but probably don't realise. We've spoken with midwives and nurses who are unaware."

The NHS Cord Blood Bank, which opened in 1996, recently issued the 500th lifesaving cord blood unit. Henry Braund, chief executive of Anthony Nolan, said:

BANK ON SAMPLES TO GIVE YOU HEALTH INSURANCE

WEARING a bright green hair net, blue overalls, oversized goggles and shoe protectors, I look like a Casualty extra, but for a good reason, writes Helen Gilbert. "I'm in the laboratory of Smart Cells, a private British company that gives parents the choice of storing their baby's umbilical cord blood stem cells and cord tissue for 25 years. At £2,500, it is not cheap but most clients, including Strictly Come Dancing judge Darcy Bussell, view it as a form of insurance against serious health problems later in life. Smart Cells founder and CEO Shamshad Ahmed said: "Stem cells are master cells that can be used to regenerate the body and repair cell damage. In

certain indications, such as genetic disorders, blood-related illnesses and metabolic disorders, it has been found that they can cure the child of its illness." The umbilical cord and blood samples are taken out in a sterile room, documented and then checked for infections before being moved into a second sterile room. Here, they are put into a machine that separates the red and white blood cells. The concentrated unit of cord blood stem cells is frozen to a temperature of -196C and stored.

Smart Cells, founded in 2000, has enjoyed growth abroad but Shamshad admitted the UK has been slow to follow, saying the NHS is unwilling to let private firms collect blood. He said: "The fact the NHS has these banks and Anthony Nolan are coming in now acts as an endorsement and authenticates the need for them. We think public banking is a great idea and should be encouraged." A Department of Health spokesman said: "It is up to individual trusts who they allow to collect cord blood at their maternity units."



GREY STILL MATTERS



I WAS reminded this week that, in my rather ridiculous life, things that could be deemed trivial in comparison to living with cancer still matter. For example, I told myself during chemo days that I would never ever complain of a bad hair day again, once my lovely locks had grown back. How wrong I was. I had my hair cut and coloured this week and it has turned out far from what I imagined. I was in fact at the hairdressers' for five hours as they tried to fix one colour after the next. I am left with very damaged, screaming hair. Sadly, chemo has done all sorts of weird stuff to the quality of it anyway, as it decided to grow back a curly, dark grey colour – which in itself is a sad state of affairs for a blonde identical twin. But I will go as far as to say that life was simple with no hair. No decisions needed to be made. I even ditched my wig within two weeks of getting it because I realised it needed looking after and brushing and thus was just too much faff! Life as an almost-30-year-old should still have its trivial moments, cackling with your girlfriends about bad dates, complaining about public transport, you know the things I am talking about because you no doubt do this too. It is, after all, NORMAL. Perhaps this is me trying to hold on to some kind of normality in a life that is far from what you may deem "normal". Perhaps having a bad hair day truly does keep my feet on the ground, it makes me feel part of your world still. Whichever way you dissect this pretty arbitrary event, when all said and done, I do still have crap hair right now, but ya know what? It's a good job it's hat weather.

Just coppafeel and look out for the following...

LOOK for changes in skin texture eg. puckering/itching	LOOK for swelling in your armpit or around collar bone
FEEL for lumps and thickening	FEEL constant pain in your breast or armpit
LOOK for nipple discharge	LOOK for a change in size and shape
LOOK for nipple inversion and changes in direction	LOOK for a rash or crusting of the nipple or surrounding area

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