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## Private cord blood bank opens in Irvine

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PacifiCord has opened a cord blood bank in Irvine, and more than 100 local parents have already opted to store their newborn child's umbilical cord blood in case illness should strike later in life and stem cells can be used to treat it.

It is the first private cord blood bank in Orange County, according to a directory provided by the nonprofit Parents' Guide to Cord Blood Foundation. PacifiCord clients are ensured that their child's umbilical stem cells will be stored for their family's exclusive use in the future, said company president and CEO Dan Segal; public cord blood banks, including one at CHOC, do not charge for harvesting the cord blood and work with the National Marrow Donor Program to find matches across the country.

Nationally, about 4 percent of newborns have their umbilical cord blood banked, Segal said. In California, that number is closer to 6 percent due to greater awareness of the procedure and its possible benefits. But the ethics around cord blood storage and its cost remains controversial, especially where private, for-profit blood banks such as PacifiCord are concerned.

Umbilical cord blood is rich in hematopoietic stem cells, which can form into multiple cell types and have been used to successfully treat diseases including leukemias and lymphomas. In clinical trials, such stem cells have been used to treat cerebral palsy and diabetes symptoms with some success, Segal said.

The American Academy of Pediatrics discourages the use of private cord blood banks, arguing that most conditions that might be helped by cord blood stem cells already exist in the infant's cord blood. The organization also says the likelihood that a child will need his own stored cord blood stem cells in the future ranges from 1 in 1,000 to more than 1 in 200,000; the American Society For Blood and Marrow Transplantation puts the range at between 1 and 200 and 1 in 400.

However, the AAP does recommend cord blood banking in cases where a sibling in the family with a malignant or genetic medical condition could potentially benefit from cord blood transplantation, as the chances of a match are substantially higher among siblings.



At \$2,000 for enrollment and a \$150 annual charge for storage, private cord blood banking is not affordable to all. Many parents who choose to bank their children's cord blood have a family history of certain cancers including leukemia and lymphoma and store the blood as insurance against future illness. Siblings also have high match rates, so the stem cells could be used to treat other family members in some cases.

Stored in liquid nitrogen and left undisturbed, stem cells can last 15 years or more, Segal said. The umbilical cord blood is collected within 10 to 15 minutes of birth, and a driver is dispatched to the hospital to pick up the blood and bring it directly to the cord blood bank.

PacifiCord Cord Blood Banking Center invites the public to tour its facility and take free prenatal education classes. Information: 888-379-2673.