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Irvine cord blood bank opens

The first private facility locally stores cells as a possible disease safeguard.

By **ERIKA CHAVEZ**
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

IRVINE • PacifiCord has opened a cord blood bank in Irvine, and more than 100 parents have used it to store their newborn children's umbilical cord blood in case the children get sick later in life and stem cells can treat the illness.

The private cord blood bank is Orange County's first, according to a directory from the nonprofit Parents' Guide to Cord Blood Foundation. PacifiCord ensures clients

their children's umbilical stem cells will be stored for their families' exclusive use in the future, said Dan Segal, company president and CEO.

Public cord blood banks, including one at Children's Hospital of Orange County, 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 put in blood banks, Segal said. In California, that

To find out more

The PacifiCord Southern California Cord Blood Center offers tours and free prenatal education classes.

Where: 185 Technology Drive, Suite 150, Irvine

Information:
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949-379-5247

number is closer to 6 percent due to more awareness of the procedure and its possible benefits.

Controversies involve the ethics of cord blood storage and its cost, especially in the cases of for-profit blood banks.

Umbilical cord blood is rich in hematopoietic stem cells, which can turn into multiple cell types and have successfully treated leukemia and lymphoma.

In clinical trials, such stem cells have had some success in treating cerebral palsy and diabetes symptoms, 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

SEE **BLOOD** • PAGE 2

BLOOD: Need for cells small, doctors say

FROM PAGE 1

the chance a child will need his own stored cord blood stem cells ranges from 1 in 1,000 to 1 in 200,000. The American Society For Blood and Marrow Transplantation puts the range at 1 in 200 to 1 in 400.

However, the pediatricians group recommends storing cord blood in a bank if a child's sibling has a malignant or genetic medical condition that could benefit from cord blood transplantation, as the chances of a match are substantially higher among siblings.

Many families that store blood in cord banks consider doing so insurance against fu-

ture disease, although the chance a child will benefit from his own stem cells is small.

Cord blood research is in its early stages, and more than 300 ongoing clinical trials using cord blood stem cells, embryonic stem cells and adult stem cells show promise of treatments for spinal cord injuries, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease and other illnesses.

Cord blood storage in a private bank has a \$2,000 enrollment cost and a \$150 annual charge for storage. Many parents who store their children's cord blood have a family history of certain cancers including

leukemia and lymphoma.

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 goes to the hospital to pick up the blood and take it to the cord blood bank.

PacifiCord is part of the Health Banks Biotech Co. in Taiwan, and the Irvine location is the first in the United States, Segal said. The company chose Irvine for its location because it's central to the area spanning Ventura to San Diego and for its proximity to UC Irvine, where stem cell research is a burgeoning area.

Stem cell research advocates were heartened by President Barack Obama's recent lifting of restrictions on federal funding for embryonic stem cell research.

While umbilical stem cells are different from embryonic stem cells, Segal also cheered the move.

"Any investment and research that helps move the science forward benefits the entire industry, as well as clients who choose to store their children's cord blood," he said.

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