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Educating Expectant Parents about Cord Blood Options Focus of New State
Law

Legislation Points to Important Role of Health Care Professionals

RALEIGH, N.C. - During a signing ceremony tonight at the Capitol Building's Old House Chamber, Gov. Beverly Perdue will sign into law House Bill (HB) 1331, which ensures that expectant parents in North Carolina will have access to medically-accurate information and education regarding umbilical cord stem cells and options for banking them well before the labor and delivery of a newborn.

"Cord blood stem cells are valuable medical resources that are increasingly being used to save and enhance lives," said the bill's sponsor, Rep. Margaret Highsmith Dickson. "North Carolina is proud to recognize the important need for all expectant parents to be educated about the potential uses and benefits of these cells - now and in the future - so they can make an informed choice about preserving them instead of letting them be discarded as medical waste."

HB 1331 will require the North Carolina Department of Health & Human Services provide free and printable educational information about umbilical cord stem cells and banking options on its Internet Web site or a link to a Federally-sponsored website with medically-accurate information sufficient to allow a pregnant woman to make an informed decision about whether to participate in a public or private umbilical cord blood banking program. The bill also encourages health care professionals to make this information available as well.

Following this evening's signing, North Carolina joins a growing number of bellwether states that have passed similar legislation that is consistent with recommendations first issued by the Institutes of Medicine in 2004.

About Cord Blood Stem Cells

The collection of cord blood stem cells occurs immediately following the birth of a newborn and causes no harm to an unborn child, newborn baby or mother. However, of the four million births in the United States each year, more than 90 percent of the stem cells in cord blood are discarded as medical waste.

"This is a critical piece of legislation to advance the health and well-being of all North Carolinians," said Rep. Dickson. "This law will reinforce North Carolina's reputation as a leader in the delivery of prenatal care and pioneer in non-embryonic stem cell research."

Cord blood is widely recognized as a rich source of stem cells. More than 15,000 cord blood stem cell transplants have been performed to date worldwide, and cord blood stem cells are currently used to treat more than 70 chronic or life-threatening diseases, including leukemia, sickle cell anemia and multiple metabolic diseases.

Duke University is Recognized Leader in Medical Use of Cord Blood

Duke University has played an important leadership role in the advancement of stem cell therapies. In fact, a Duke patient received the first cord blood transplant 20 years ago and as a result is alive and well today. Currently, Duke's pediatric transplant program is the largest center of its kind, having performed more than 800 cord blood transplants in children since 1993.

"Cord blood saves lives and provides access to transplantation for patients who lack a matched donor, especially those of ethnic and racial minority backgrounds," said Joanne Kurtzberg, M.D., professor of Pediatrics and Pathology and the program director for Pediatric Blood and Marrow Transplantation at Duke University. "I am delighted that the State of North Carolina has passed this bill, and that the special role that North Carolina has played in developing the field of cord blood transplantation and banking can be formally recognized."

Duke University is one of the primary collection hospitals for Carolinas Cord Blood Bank, which has processed and stored approximately 25,000 units donated by women in North Carolina, and has provided more than 1000 units to patients with leukemia, metabolic diseases and sickle cell anemia.

The North Carolina blood education law requires the State Health and Human Services Commission to prepare an online brochure based on nationally accepted, peer-reviewed, scientific research. Until the materials are complete, expectant parents can gain information from existing sources including: ParentsGuideCordBlood.org
<<http://www.parentsguidecordblood.org>> .

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