

MEDIA RELEASE

Embargoed 9 March 2016

Australia first: cord blood research may unlock future treatments for cerebral palsy

Australia's first clinical trial of stem cell infusion from cord blood as a possible treatment for cerebral palsy (CP) is commencing in Melbourne. The safety trial, led by the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute (MCRI), will recruit patients nationally and take place at The Royal Children's Hospital. Expected to take two years, the study is being funded by the Cerebral Palsy Alliance Research Foundation and Cell Care, Australia's largest private cord blood bank. It is the first step in a promising process that eventually aims to find out whether cord blood infusion is both safe and efficacious for children with the condition.

Professor Dinah Reddihough, Head of Developmental Disability and Rehabilitation Research at MCRI and lead investigator commented, "We are very excited about the announcement of this study which will primarily assess the safety of using sibling cord blood in children with CP. The study will also make preliminary investigations into changes in motor skills in these children."

For this safety trial, MCRI will recruit children with CP aged one to 11 years, who have sibling cord blood stored in one of Australia's family cord blood banks.

"Early-stage clinical studies have suggested that there may be slight improvements in motor function when a child's *own* cord blood or *unrelated* cord blood, has been infused in the setting of CP. This study is assessing *sibling* cord blood infusion as a possible treatment for children with CP. Siblings have a 25 per cent chance of being a full match and we therefore expect only a small group of children will be eligible for this trial," said Professor Reddihough.

Cerebral palsy is a physical disability that affects movement and posture. It is a permanent life-long condition and is caused by damage to the developing brain either during pregnancy or shortly after birth. Every 15 hours, an Australian child is born with CP, making it the most common physical disability in childhood.

Professor Iona Novak, Head Of Research, Cerebral Palsy Alliance Research Institute said that "the importance of the study cannot be underestimated".

"Unfortunately we hear of many Australian children with CP and their families travelling overseas to receive unregulated stem cell treatments at great cost. This study, using cord blood which has been stored under Australian Government regulated conditions, is an important first step towards potentially improving treatment options available for children with CP," said Professor Novak.

Many Australian families have stored their children's cord blood in anticipation of future advances in the field. In anticipation of research trials in Australia, Cell Care recently established a free cord blood collection and storage program for siblings of a child with CP which has had strong uptake.

Melbourne mother, Carly Stewart, has three children including eight-year old Lachlan who was diagnosed with CP shortly after birth. Commenting on the start of the trial, Ms Stewart said, "I'm so glad that we made the decision to store both of Lachlan's siblings' cord blood in the hope that one day he might benefit. We are excited about this Australian trial commencing and the promising future of this much-talked about treatment. I encourage other families to store their children's cord blood."

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Available for interview:

- Professor Dinah Reddiough, MCRI
- Professor Iona Novak, Cerebral Palsy Alliance
- Rob White, Cerebral Palsy Alliance
- Professor Mark Kirkland, Cell Care
- Carly Stewart, mother to 8-year old Lachlan who has severe CP and who chose to store the cord blood of her other two children (now 6 years and 4.5 years)
- Shae Finnigan, mother to 3.5 year-old Amelia who has mild CP, 34 weeks pregnant and will have her baby's cord blood collected and stored via the free collection program with the hope of entering the Australian trial.

