CU Cord Blood Bank wins $6.3 million federal award to collect and bank umbilical cord blood, with emphasis on minority donors

AURORA, Colo. (Oct. 5, 2010) – The University of Colorado Cord Blood Bank, a component of ClinImmune Labs and the University of Colorado School of Medicine, has been awarded $6.3 million to collect and bank umbilical cord blood, with an emphasis on donors from minority groups. The three-year grant is from the Health Resources and Services Administration, a division of the United States Department of Health and Human Services. Umbilical cord blood, collected from the placenta after a baby is born, is rich in stem cells and can be used to treat patients with blood-related illnesses such as leukemia.

ClinImmune Labs is an academic component of the medical school that provides genetic testing for transplant patients in addition to stem cell processing and umbilical cord blood banking. The bank will use the funding to support an additional 5,000 cord blood units.

“We are so grateful to the Colorado women who selflessly donate their babies’ cord blood to our public bank and to the hospitals that collect this life-saving product,” says Brian Freed, PhD, professor of medicine and immunology at CU’s School of Medicine and executive director of ClinImmune Labs. The grant will also allow expansion of cord blood collection to Arizona in collaboration with the Arizona Biomedical Research Commission.

This contract will focus on collecting cord blood from minorities in order to expand the cord blood bank’s genetic diversity and increase the chances for minority patients requiring cord blood transplantation to find a genetic match.

Freed says having the right cord blood available can be a matter of life and death.

“There are currently almost 10,000 leukemia patients needing a bone marrow transplant die every year in the U.S. because they cannot find a suitably matched stem cell donor,” Freed says. “Cord blood transplants now make up one quarter of all bone marrow transplants in this country, compared to less than 2 percent in 2000. Caucasian patients have a 90 percent chance of finding a well-matched cord blood donor, but African-American patients have only a 50 percent chance.”

Three Colorado hospitals will participate as part of the federal contract renewal: Denver Health Medical Center and Exempla Saint Joseph Hospital in Denver, and Poudre Valley Hospital in Fort Collins. In addition, the cord blood bank is expanding cord blood collections to women delivering at other hospitals throughout Colorado through the Adult Stem Cell Cure Fund.
Located next to the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus in Aurora, the cord blood bank is a public facility with a 14-year history of collecting, processing, banking and distributing cord blood for human transplantation. The bank has collected and banked more than 8,000 cord blood units, 560 of which have been transplanted at 110 different transplant centers in the U.S. and around the world.

The cord blood bank is accredited by the AABB (formerly known as the American Association of Blood Banks) and operated by immunogeneticists and stem cell transplant physicians.

Faculty at the University of Colorado School of Medicine work to advance science and improve care. These faculty members include physicians, educators and scientists at University of Colorado Hospital, The Children’s Hospital, Denver Health, National Jewish Health, and the Denver Veterans Affairs Medical Center. Degrees offered by the School of Medicine include doctor of medicine, doctor of physical therapy, and master of physician assistant studies. The school is located on the Anschutz Medical Campus, one of four campuses in the University of Colorado system. For additional news and information, please visit the UC Denver newsroom online.

The Anschutz Medical Campus is a model for the type of interdisciplinary research in translational medicine that will take basic discovery “from the bench to the bedside.”

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