

# Cord blood can aid future medical battles

BY MICHELLE L. START  
Florida Weekly Correspondent

Every year along with his property taxes, Dr. Kevin Fleishman receives another bill.

Nine years ago, Fleishman decided to collect his newborn son's umbilical cord blood and have it sent to Cryobanks International in Altamonte Springs for storage.

As an obstetrician with Physicians Primary Care of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Southwest Florida Regional Medical Center, he knew the chances of his son Jared ever needing it were slim. Fleishman said only about one in 4,000 people ever need their cord blood.

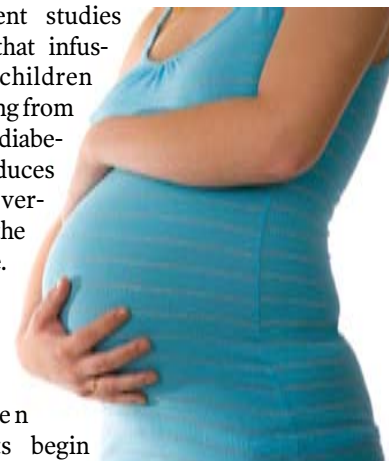
"But, I knew there would be more options in the future. I figured that I had the opportunity and wherewithal to save it," he said. "God forbid but if he needed it in the future, I would have it."

The umbilical cord blood is rich with stem cells, which are primal cells found in all multi-cellular organisms. They retain the ability to renew themselves through cell division and can change into a diverse range of specialized cell types.

Cord blood transplants began in 1988 after a boy suffering from Fanconi's anemia received the first one. The first unrelated transplant took place in 1993. Today, there are about 500 per year.

The cells can be used to treat cancers, bone marrow failure systems like severe aplastic anemia, blood disorders, errors of metabolism like Hunter syndrome, immunodeficiencies and osteopetrosis. Every day, research is revealing new ways for the cells to be used.

Recent studies show that infusing children suffering from stage 1 diabetes reduces the severity of the disease.



When patients begin prenatal visits, obstetricians discuss the option of storing cord blood. For some, the cost is too burdensome, but they decide instead to donate the cells.

Fleishman said collection and storage fees can be more than \$2,000. Additionally, there is typically an annual storage fee. Fleishman's is \$120 per year.

"It is for people who can afford it," he said. "Unfortunately, a lot of people cannot."

Fleishman estimates that between 3 percent and 5 percent of his patients opt for the procedure. During a typical month, he delivers about 18 babies.

The collection process takes between two and four minutes. A needle is connected to a tube and the cord blood flows with gravity to a collection container while the placenta is still attached to the mother. ■



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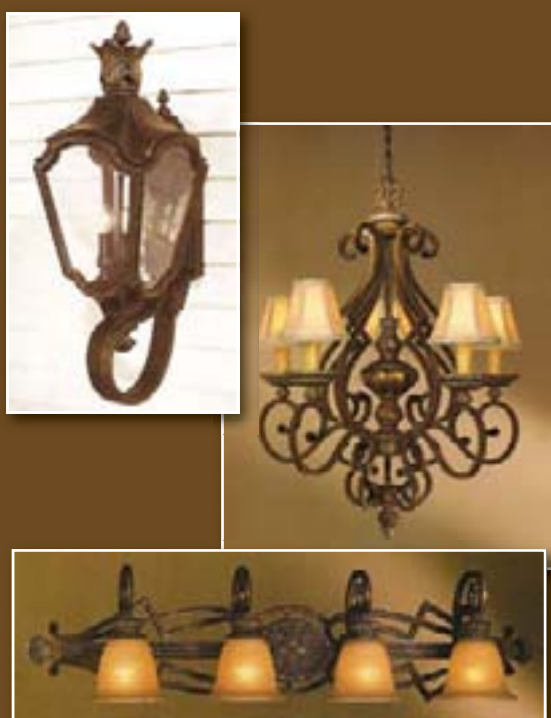
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