Information for patients

Private umbilical cord blood collection

This patient information leaflet provides information to expectant parents who are considering private (commercial) umbilical cord blood collection following delivery of their baby at the Homerton University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust ("the Trust")

What is cord blood?
Cord blood is the baby's blood that remains in the placenta and cord after birth. Following birth the blood in the placenta and cord is no longer needed and is usually disposed of carefully. Cord blood contains different cells including some stem cells. Stem cells are the building blocks of all other cells in the body and can grow into these different kinds of cells.

Why is cord blood useful?
Cord blood is currently used in the treatment of blood disorders such as leukaemia, some immune system disorders and metabolic storage disorders. Some scientists claim that cord blood could be used to potentially treat other diseases but there is no sound evidence as yet to support these claims.

What is cord blood banking?
Cord blood banking is the collection and storage of cord blood for the possible future treatment of a disease or illness. There are two types of banks: public and private.

Public banks
You can donate cord blood to a public bank in a small number of NHS hospitals. At present, you cannot do this at the Trust. When there is medical indication for cord blood collection due to a family history of a blood disorder or other relevant condition please discuss this with your obstetrician who will be able to refer you appropriately for arrangement and advice of the process for collection of cord blood for stem cell collection. In those circumstances, it may be possible to arrange for the cord blood to be collected and stored in the NHS Cord Blood Bank (NHS CBB) for future use by your family. You should discuss this further with your doctor.

Private banks
It is possible to store cord blood with a private organisation and some people decide to do so in the hope that stem cells may be useful if a member of their family develops a condition which can be treated by stem cell therapy. It is important to remember that the chances of your child ever needing to use his or her own cord blood are very small. The Royal College of Midwives (2011) and the Royal College of Obstetricians (2006) do not support the private collection of cord blood for low risk families due to the current lack of evidence to support the procedure.

A number of private banks are now marketing their cord blood services through GP surgeries, antenatal clinics and direct contact with the public. Private banks usually charge a fee for the collection of the cord blood during the third stage of childbirth and storage facilities. The Human Tissue Authority ("HTA") regulates the collection of cord blood in the UK and any private bank must hold a licence with the HTA.

Like many NHS organisations, the Trust is not licensed by the HTA to collect cord blood and therefore does not offer this service.

What do I do if I want to arrange for private cord blood banking?
If you wish to arrange for the private collection and storage of cord blood, you must notify your Midwife at the earliest opportunity. While the Trust does not support the private collection of stem cells and its staff will not assist with the collection of cord blood, the Trust will not prevent you undergoing this procedure provided you and your chosen private bank comply with the Trust’s policy and the
requirements. Once you have notified your midwife that you are considering private banking, the Trust will send you a letter to confirming its policy and explaining what you need to do.

**Further information**
The Trust’s primary concern is the health and safety of mothers and babies in its care and it encourages any expectant parents who are considering private cord blood stem cell collection to think carefully about the risks and benefits of doing so. You can find further information via these sources:


2. Royal College of Midwives, position statement (2011), available by emailing info@rcm.org.uk