

breaking [the code]



Formally a science teacher at Brookstone School, Michael Bonaker now spends his days promoting Stork Medical as the company's Atlanta Regional Manager.

Statistically speaking, one out of every 333 babies will develop cancer before the age of 21. What would you give if you could protect your child from suffering from a childhood cancer? Though it may seem like something straight out of a science fiction novel, stem cell storage is the latest trend in modern scientific breakthroughs. With the rising number of diseases, cancers and blood disorders that are treatable through the use of stem cells, now is the time to begin planning for the future.

Stork Medical is a national company that has recently put down roots in an effort to bring this amazing medical process to Columbus. Atlanta Regional Manager Michael Bonaker recently sat down with *Southern Views* to give us the inside scoop on these little building blocks of the body known as stem cells and what they can do for you.

When a newborn baby arrives, parents are now able to collect their baby's cord blood and store the stem cells. What are the benefits in storing these cells? Stem cells are "master cells." They can be used to form the building blocks of your blood and immune system. These master cells lead to the production of all the various types of cells in the body. In other words, these cells can become heart cells, brain cells,

spinal cord cells and more. In time, doctors hope to be able to repair any damaged organ in the body with these master cells. Currently, stem cells are used to treat a growing list of diseases. This includes certain cancers, leukemias and blood disorders. Over time, we hope that heart disease, diabetes, spinal cord injury, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, stroke, burns, breast cancer and many other causes of pain, paralysis and death will be treatable because of these cells.

What are the chances that a family will need the stem cells if they choose to save their cord blood? In 1980, there were no opportunities to use stem cells. In 1987, there was only one disease treatable with stem cells. Currently, there are 76 treatable diseases. It used to be that only one out of 40,000 samples was being retrieved for usage. Now, one out of every 2,700 samples is being used. Imagine the future for stem cells as our medical technology advances.

When does your company recommend families sign-up for stem cell storage and how much does storage cost? We recommend that families sign up as soon as possible. We even have "layaway" accounts available so that families can begin saving for this important service even before they are pregnant. Stork

Medical provides a Welcome Packet that can give families accurate information about stem cell storage that will allow them to make an informed decision. Our Standard Plan for storage is \$1650.00 and this includes the first year of storage. The annual storage fee after the first year is \$108.00 per year.

How long can the stem cells be stored and still remain viable? Stored stem cells will likely be viable indefinitely. Cells stored for up to 15 years have been used successfully. Our processing and storage laboratory is located in Paramus, New Jersey. It is an industry leader in this field. It has been in business as a blood center for over 50 years. It has stored stem cells since the early years of this science and has had numerous successful transplants.

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Because cord blood collection and stem cell storage are fairly new scientific ventures, many people are not familiar with the processes used. Could you explain how cord blood is collected and what methods are used for stem cell storage? Cord blood storage is a pain-free process using umbilical cord blood that would be otherwise discarded. Stem cell collection usually begins several minutes after a couple has been given their baby to hold. Nothing extra is done to the baby, and it should not interrupt family bonding time. Prior to delivery, Mom will have to undergo a blood draw to screen for federally mandated infectious disease testing. The doctor will deliver the placenta (afterbirth)

and, using our specialized collection kit, sterilely collect the placental cord blood. Stork Medical uses blood bags for storage, just like the Red Cross. Multiple compartments are used so that a small amount can be tested or used without disturbing the entire sample.

How long has Stork Medical been in the Columbus area and when did the company begin storing stem cells? Stork Medical is a young company that has partnered with the country's leading laboratory. Stork created this strategic partnership so that there would never be any worries about its longevity. Stored cells are protected for as long as the family desires. Stork Medical has been planned for five years, in business for approximately three years and opened in Columbus this past year.

Stork Medical is a private stem cell bank. What features differentiate a private stem cell bank from a public one? Public stem cell banks are an important resource for those families that cannot afford to store their baby's cells privately. They provide cells to sick patients that do not have their own cells to draw upon. The New England Journal of Medicine noted that these cells are useful, but not as likely as one's own cells to be effective. We at Stork Medical strongly support the development of public banks. These banks will help those of us who were born before stem cell storage was possible and those of us who cannot afford to store privately. Unfortunately, donor cells are less likely to be an effective treatment.

If a family chooses to store their stem cells privately, will other members of their family be able to benefit from the stem cells as well? A baby's stem cells can be used to help save the lives of other family members. The closer the



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blood relation to the baby, the more valuable these cells are to an individual.

Stem cell research has been showcased in two opposing lights since the onset of cloning trials. Are stem cells stored in private banks used in stem cell research? Stored stem cells are the property of the child and parents. They can only be released for use with their permission. We test them for quantity, quality and contamination. They are never used for cloning or research. Federal law prohibits cloning. Therefore, even if the family wanted them for this use, it would not be possible.

If a couple was planning to adopt, would stem cell storage be available to them as well? If the couple was able to negotiate with the birth mother prior to her delivery, the baby's stem cells could certainly be stored. There would have to be blood testing of the birth mother to make sure that diseases like HIV and Sickle Cell Anemia were not present in her blood. I am sure some legal papers would have to be drawn and arrangements would have to be made before the delivery.

Where should families who are considering cord blood storage go for more information? Educating the public is a top priority for Stork Medical and this is one reason why we are pleased to be interviewed for your magazine. We take pride in offering many pages of excellent information on our website at www.stork.md. Families can also call us directly on our toll free line at 866-65STORK. In addition to our wonderful support staff and sales representatives, Stork Medical always has doctors and nurses available to answer any questions. We are happy to send families an information packet and enjoy speaking with and helping expectant parents and their family members. Even though we believe every newborn should have their stem cells stored, we never want anyone to feel pressured to purchase our product. Contact us—you'll be glad you did! **svm**



Stork Medical believes all newborn babies should have the opportunity to store their stem cells.

*Interview by Vanessa Rusch Thomas.
Special Thanks to Stork Medical.*