

Saved by a Cell

Two local children owe their survival from leukemia to cord blood stem cells

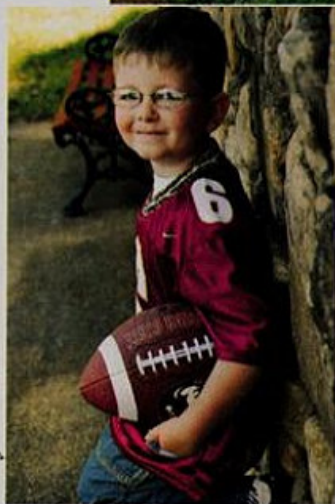
By Denise Foley

Blake Spivey and Wade Wolfe were diagnosed with the same form of rare and deadly leukemia within a few weeks of each other in 2006. Three years later, they owe their survival to the same modern-day miracle: transplanted umbilical cord blood stem cells.

"Without cord blood stem cells, there was a 90 percent chance of the cancer returning after the initial treatment," explains Wade's mother, Jaclyn.

"Just a short time ago, children with this disease did not typically survive," says the boys' hematologist/oncologist Arthur Provisor, MD, of The Children's Hospital of the Medical Center of Central Georgia.

Previously healthy, both Wade, then 4, and Blake, then 3, suddenly came down with troubling symptoms. Blake was first to fall ill. He began to play less and complain to



his parents about back pain. Over the next several weeks, the pain spread to his shoulders, feet, and limbs. Eventually, a bone scan and bone marrow sample confirmed the worst: Blake had acute lymphocytic leukemia (ALL) with a chromosome abnormality that made the disease even more deadly.

Wade's journey from illness to diagnosis was much shorter. After suffering from a low-grade fever for 10 days, a brief physical examination and simple blood test confirmed he, too, had ALL with the same chromosome abnormality. Neither of the boys had a family history of blood-related cancers.

More than 70 diseases, leukemia chief among them, are now treatable or curable with stem cells, which serve as raw material for many different cell types in the body. A basic stem cell can be induced into turning into a bone marrow, skin, muscle, brain, or even a heart cell to replace damaged cells like those found in cancer.



Above: Wade Wolfe is enjoying life.
Left: Blake Spivey is healthy and happy today.

The stem cells that gave new life to Wade and Blake came from Stork Medical, Columbus's only blood storage company. Jonathan L. Liss, MD, the company's medical director, says that more than 8,000 people have already received cord blood transplants nationwide. Duke University recently performed the first cord blood transfusion on a child with cerebral palsy. The video, which can be found on the Stork website, www.stork.md, shows the transformation of an 18-month-old who could not speak or walk into a nearly normal child just five days after an infusion of his own cord blood. The entire "transplant" took about 15 minutes as the child played with his toys.

Jaclyn said her son had a similar experience: "I remember saying, 'You must be kidding me. This is all there is to a transplant?' Wade laughed and giggled the entire time."

Dr. Liss says he believes the future of stem cell transplant is extremely bright. "I foresee

major breakthroughs in virtually every major disease," he says. "The University of Florida is attempting to cure diabetes with these cells. New bladders from stem cells are already replacing those that are diseased and damaged. New finger tips have already been grown on recently severed fingers. Very promising research into multiple sclerosis, lupus, spinal cord injury, Alzheimer's disease, stroke, and burns is under way."

For Blake's mother, Lisa, it's all very personal. "What can be done with cord blood is mind-boggling," she says. "It absolutely floors me that we have been throwing cord blood into the garbage. Everyone should be storing their cord blood. It has saved my child's life." **BHL**

FYI:

To store your own cord blood, contact Stork Medical at 866-65-STORK.