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Baby's cells save Danny [THE STAR (SHEFFIELD)]

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A BRAVE Sheffield schoolboy is today recovering at home from his second life-saving operation - using stem cells from the placenta of a baby born in Germany.

Ten-year-old Danny Kerkhoff, from Arbourthorne, has been battling acute lymphoblastic leukaemia for six years and is hoping the cord blood transplant, carried out in Sheffield, will finally help him to beat the disease.

It is the Arbourthorne Primary School pupil's second transplant in seven months - after a conventional bone marrow transplant failed.

Doctors hope the stem cells - donated from a "bank" set up to store potentially life-saving cord blood from newborn babies - will kickstart Danny's immune system and help him fight infection.

Sheffield Children's Hospital was the first place in the UK to offer cord blood transplants and in the nine years since around 40 children have benefited from the technique.

Danny is only the second youngster in the hospital to undergo a second transplant within months of the first after medical advances made it possible to offer the operation shortly after the first if needed.

His determination to battle through years of hospital treatment, which has included numerous setbacks, has been an inspiration to his family and friends.

"He's coped extremely well," said mum Janet, aged 46, who praised the care he had received at the Children's Hospital.

"He has a very laid-back attitude and grown-up way of dealing with it. He also has a wicked sense of humour and that has helped him cope." The Blades fan first fell ill with what was thought to be mumps and the news he had leukaemia came as a huge shock to parents Janet and Neil, 40, who also have an older son, Antony, 14.

Over the years Danny has had to cope with numerous bouts of chemotherapy and radiotherapy plus an exploratory operation.

He's also suffered three relapses and has needed treatment in intensive care. But he remains positive through all the difficulties he has faced.

His courage has inspired his school to host regular blood donor sessions which have strong support from parents and teachers.

Consultant haematologist Dr Ajay Vora, who cares for Danny, and carried out the UK's first cord blood transplant in 1998, says scientific breakthroughs mean doctors now have more options for treating children with leukaemia.

Around 80 per cent of children with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia can be cured using one course of chemotherapy. But others, like Danny, need bone marrow or cord blood transplants to help them fight the disease.

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