

Cord blood from Ashley's birth could someday mean ... Saving Destiny

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Procedure can help save children, adults with certain cancers

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By EDWINA P. GARZA/Valley Morning Star

HARLINGEN - When Ashley Rosie Hernandez came into the world Wednesday night, she brought 129.5 milliliters of blood with her that may help save her sister's life.

The girls' mother, San Juana Hernandez, donated the baby's umbilical cord blood, which helps save children and adults who have cancers like leukemia and lymphoma.

Destiny, Ashley's 2-year-old sister, suffers from leukemia.

"It's typically medical waste," said Celestial Jackson, a nurse and cord blood coordinator at Valley Baptist Medical Center-Harlingen, where Ashley was born Wednesday.

Hernandez, of San Benito, is one of almost 2,000 mothers to donate her cord blood at VMBC, Jackson said.

The blood within the umbilical cord contains rich stem cells that can be used as alternatives to bone marrow transplants to treat different cancers, sickle-cell anemia, and severe immune system disorders.

Jackson said the cord blood from Ashley's birth will be stored for Destiny when she's ready for a transplant.

VBMC in Brownsville also accepts cord blood donations.

A state law requires physicians to inform their patients about this option, Jackson said, and since established in Harlingen in May 2006, expectant mothers are excited.

"They want to help save a life," she said. "It's like a really good recycling project."

When Hernandez first heard about the procedure, she said she was excited to know she and her newborn could help Destiny.

There is no cost associated with the donation, nor is there any pain, Jackson said.

"It's amazing what they can do with it," she said.

Inside her hospital room, Hernandez mulled the excitement of her seventh child - her sixth girl - and the possibilities of this new project.

"It's something beautiful because it's going to help save my daughter's life," Hernandez said in Spanish. "We didn't expect this."

Destiny on Thursday, the evening her mother and little sister were discharged, remained in the pediatric ward, accompanied by her father.

During her pregnancy, Jackson said Hernandez couldn't hold Destiny because of the toddler's chemotherapy treatments.

"(Destiny) doesn't know about this, and I don't think she'd understand," Hernandez said of Ashley's donation. "Maybe one day she can tell her friends."



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