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Cord Blood Stem Cells Treat Cerebral Palsy—And a Potential Problem For Regenerative Medicine Overall

Wednesday, November 18, 2009, 10:19 AM
Wesley J. Smith

Here's some good news. A child with cerebral palsy has been successfully treated with umbilical cord blood stem cells. **From the story:**

The Levines were in luck: Dr. Joanne Kurtzberg, a professor of pediatrics and pathology at Duke University, was conducting a study where children with cerebral palsy were injected with their own cord blood cells. On May 28, 2008, at the age of 2, Chloe received a 15-minute re-infusion of her stem cells...Within four days, her parents saw a noticeable difference, although Kurtzberg said most kids show [benefits](#) three to nine months later. The rigidity on Chloe's right side loosened up and her speech started to improve. She was able to ride her toy tractor, which in the past had been too difficult for her to pedal. "Her life is completely normal, she doesn't drag her right foot, she can use her right hand," Jenny Levine said. "She rides a bike, a scooter...we're taking her skiing this year. She's fabulous." At this time, Kurtzberg said she does not know how long the effects of cord blood will last on kids like Chloe, but if there is a good chance it will be "durable and last indefinitely." This is essential, since most babies have enough cells for only one infusion.



It goes without saying that had this been an embryonic stem cell breakthrough, there would have been a stampede to report.

And now some potentially disturbing, which illustrates that regenerative medicine is new and not without its perils. **From the story:**

Researchers at the University of Granada and the University of Leon have demonstrated that transplantation of stem cells (human mononuclear cells isolated from umbilical cord blood) accelerated cirrhosis in rats with cirrhosis. This demonstrates the use of stem cells in regenerative medicine may be harmful to human health. The study appears in the November issue of the journal Cell Transplantation. The original aim of the study was to determine if the use of human umbilical cord blood that contained stem cells could produce regeneration of liver cells damaged by cirrhosis. The results indicate an increase in liver damage and kidney damage as well. The overall results indicate that much more research is needed in the use of stem cells in regenerative medicine. The existence of disease in the targeted organ may prevent stem cells from regenerating tissues.

This is why much work remains to be done, particularly with extensive animal testing.

Regenerative medicine offers great hope for us all. But we must also understand that it isn't a magic wand and that a lot of research remains before the tale is fully told.

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