

## **In the works - cheap way to grow stem cells**

*Straits Times: February 27, 2002*

Local cord blood bank, CordLife, is developing a process which will increase the number of stem cells in the samples it collects.

If successful, such process could get stem cells in the cord blood to multiply and be used more effectively to treat illnesses such as anemia and leukemia.

Doctors here have recently cured two cancer patients by using blood from umbilical cords, without first destroying their bone marrow with chemotherapy.

Currently, the number of stem cells in each sample of umbilical cord blood is finite.

CordLife founder and CEO Steven Fang said: "Ideally, you should try to have more stem cells because in treatment, the heavier a person is, the more stem cells he will need to replace his diseased cells."

In cord blood, the stem cells can be turned into various types of blood cells: red, white and platelets.

He noted that the bank's latest research will be conducted at the new \$1.5 million lab facility in Camden Medical Center off Grange Road, which was opened officially yesterday.

As a private cord blood bank, CordLife extracts blood from the baby's umbilical cord at birth, tests and processes the sample, then freezes and stores the stem cells, for a fee.

Mr Fang said: "It's actually quite hard to grow these cells with current methods, because they can react to chemicals or materials and start differentiating to become blood cells, and thus are no longer of use to the patient."

But in the new process, CordLife's scientists are trying to mimic the "natural environment" of the cells.

It is proving to be so promising that CordLife is currently patenting it, he said.

He added that he expects results in six months.

"It's a proven platform and it can be used to grow 10 to 10,000 samples easily, and relatively cheaply as well."

Eventually, said Mr Fang, CordLife will offer families this chance to increase the number of stem cells in their sample, for an extra fee.

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