

A Chance to Participate in Groundbreaking Stem Cell Trial for Autism

By JOY ANGELICA SUBIDO

Stem cells have often been called the "magic brew" with a potential to correct many kinds of physiological anomalies and cure medical ailments. The premise is that stem cells are pluripotent or capable of differentiating into different cell types in the body under the right circumstances. As such, they have the capacity to replace the cells damaged or destroyed by disease. It is precisely on the premise that stem cells have restorative or corrective capabilities that Dr. Joanne Kurtzberg, who leads Duke's Robertson Cell and Translational Therapy Program and Geraldine Dawson, director of the Duke Center for Autism Diagnosis and Treatment, are seeking to develop effective groundbreaking therapies.

Currently, the treatments for autism consist of behavioral, medical (pharmacological) and nutritional approaches. This is to help individuals improve their social interaction, communication skills and flexibility. However, one of the more exciting developments in the field of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) is the possibility of using stem cells to treat the neurodevelopmental disorder. For family members of those with the condition, the possibility that umbilical cord blood cells can treat autism and brain-related disorders gives new hope. Undoubtedly, a cellular approach to the treatment of autism using stem cells will be a major breakthrough in the treatment of the condition.

To test the regenerative capabilities of stem cells in ASD, Duke Medicine was awarded a 15-million dollar grant by Atlanta-based Marcus Foundation. The project will consist of a series of clinical trials using umbilical cord blood cells to determine their regenerative effect. The clinical trial is entirely sponsored by Duke Medicine so participants are not required to pay for the costs of treatment.

Apart from treating patients based in the United States, Duke Medicine has also opened its door for possible participants from other countries. That is, of course, if they meet the inclusion and exclusion criteria. To be considered, patients must be between 24 months and 72 months old. The patient would also need to travel at least three times to Duke Medicine in the United States – at the infusion, the six- and 12-month follow up stages. A stipend worth US\$1,000 will likewise be provided to the trial participant per trip to help defray travel expenses.

Most importantly, the patient must have had his own cord blood stem cells stored privately. Locally, this gives clients of Cordlife an edge. Cordlife Medical Philippines, Inc. collects cord blood cells without risk to the mother or baby shortly after birth so that these can be frozen and stored for future use in stem cell transplantation or cellular therapies. Operating since 2010, the company is a subsidiary of Cordlife Group Limited, a Singapore Exchange Mainboard listed company that has leading presence in other countries such as Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, including investments in Malaysia, China and Thailand. Notably, the company is highly regarded as the most experienced network of cord blood banks with proven track record of over 250 transplants for 50 indications.

"At Cordlife, we share the parents' interest in alleviating the pain and suffering of their children stricken with illnesses," says Jeremy Yee, Chief Executive Officer of Cordlife Group



Dr. Arvin Faundo, Cordlife Philippines medical director: "A positive outcome in clinical trials using cord blood stem cells would pave the way for more patients to benefit from a novel treatment for autism."

Limited. "Over the years, we have earned the trust of parents to store their babies' precious cord blood and cord lining with us. The Duke Medicine research program confirms our long-held beliefs that the potential for future use of cord blood and cord lining will grow with advancements in cell therapy."

Cordlife is reaching out to families of children with autism who wish to participate in Duke Medicine's clinical trial. Positive results in the trial will consequently lead to favorable inroads in the treatment of this extremely challenging condition. "Statistics indicate that autism affects approximately one million individuals in the Philippines. A positive outcome in the trial would allow more patients to benefit from this



Cordlife's facilities are managed by highly qualified laboratory biotechnologists, and equipped with multiple back-up systems to ensure integrity and viability of stored samples.



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novel treatment for autism," says Dr. Arvin Faundo, Cordlife Philippines medical director. "We acknowledge the foresight of parents who made the choice to privately bank their child's cord blood stem cells because they have an opportunity to make invaluable contributions to science and society."

Interested trial applicants may contact Cordlife Philippines @ (02) 470 1735 or send an email to therapy@cordlife.com.

PAWS holds 'Linggo ng Aspin'

In April 2010, the Philippine Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) Aspin Club was formed with the goal of improving how Filipinos view and treat native and mixed-breed dogs by celebrating their unique characteristics and helping people make the right choice — the choice to adopt aspins from shelters and pounds or rescued off the streets.

PAWS coined the term "aspin" to replace the term "askal." The latter, which is short for "asong kalye" or "street dog" was viewed as a more negative term as it assumes that it is acceptable for dogs to be left on the streets to fend for themselves.

"In the early days, *laging ita-pwera ang native dogs. Hindi sila pwedeng sumali sa purebred clubs like the Shih Tzu Club or the German Shepherd Club. Wala ring activities. Hindi pwedeng sumali sa dog shows,*" PAWS executive director Anna Cabrera narrates. "*Yung mga aspins, naging bantay lang ng bahay, nakatali* — which is wrong. Dogs are social animals. They are part of the family and should not spend their life tied or chained."

PAWS officers were unanimous in their decision that, aside from their current education and outreach programs, there was a need to create an exclusive club for aspins so that aspin owners would feel that they belonged to a community and that they would be encouraged to bring their native dogs out more often to socialize them.

Since its launch, the PAWS Aspin Club has already organized an agility event and pet-pampering day, participated in dog walks against animal cruelty and hosted several lectures promoting responsible pet ownership.

On Aug. 31, PAWS teams up with Eastwood City to mount its biggest event yet — the "Linggo ng Aspin" — a day when native and mixed-breed dogs can participate in fun activities amidst a fiesta-like setting at the Eastwood Central Plaza. Major sponsor is Pet One while minor sponsors are Frontline Plus and Betterdog.

Main highlight for the day is the fun race where owners and their pets will go head to head to complete a challenging obstacle course in the shortest amount of time. Aspins are also encouraged to come in their best Filipiniana attire and vie for the title "Ginoo and Binibining Aspin." Exciting prizes await the winners.

With this event, PAWS hopes to awaken that sense of national pride in Pinoys and at the same time make Filipinos realize that native dogs are just like them — a mix of many nationalities or "breeds" but still uniquely beautiful and intelligent. PAWS sees the aspins as one of the nation's most overlooked treasures, an underdog in every



Let the Aspins out: The Philippine Animal Welfare Society holds Linggo ng Aspin on Aug. 31 at Eastwood City.

sense, and hopes that their Aspin Club events will change all that.

The registration fee of P350 for non-PAWS Aspin Club members and P150 for members includes a shirt, a dog bandana and freebies from sponsors. The registration table for the race opens at 2 p.m. while the "Ginoo and Binibining Aspin" contestants can sign up starting 3 p.m. Bring your dog's updated vaccination records.

For information, call 475-1688 or or e-mail philpaws@yahoo.com

'The Bow & Wow Times' on the food and health connection

Dogs, just like humans, can be afflicted with numerous health issues other than pesky fleas and ticks that can cause allergic reaction. The latest issue of *The Bow & Wow Times* zeroes in on fact that your beloved pooches can develop illnesses as a result of poor nutrition and chemicals in things they end up ingesting.

Canine health rests a great deal on the attention and care pet parents give them. As *The Bow & Wow Times* editorial stated, "Unlike humans, pets do not make their own food choices and rely solely on their pet parents to nourish them well. As pet parents, it is our full responsibility to make healthy food choices for our dogs and cats."

Flip the pages of *The Bow & Wow Times* to find very helpful articles, including "5 Telltale Signs of Poor Pet Nutrition" and "What's In Your Pet's Food?" Poor nutrition of animals can lead to serious health issues like nerve & immune disorders and other degenerative diseases. Browse the write-up on "How Poor Nutrition Leads to Ill Health in Animals" for a heads-up on how insufficient life-sustaining nutrients in commercial dog food can eventually snuff the life out of your pet.

Can you tell if your pet has a food sensitivity? Turn to the informative article is "Is Your Pet the Sensitive Type?" for some handy tips and in-

formation. Also a must-read is the feature article listing the "Top 10 Signs of Cancer in Pets."

For some dietary tips that aid in giving a beautiful luster and sheen to your canine friend's coat, peruse the article, "Improve Your Pet's Coat Through Nutrition."

Bow & Wow is located at level five of Shangri-La Plaza Mall, Mandaluyong City; at the lower ground floor of Greenbelt 5, Makati City; at the second floor, Al Fresco, Robinsons Magnolia in New Manila, Quezon City; at the ground floor, Excelsior, Eastwood City, Libis, Q.C. and at the newly-opened third floor, New Wing of Ayala Center in Cebu City.

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