

The Scarborough Hospital offers umbilical cord blood banking New partnership provides education about value of cord blood to diverse community

By Tracy Huffman



Christine Ross (left) and her son Barrett shared their story at The Scarborough Hospital about how Christine's decision to bank umbilical cord blood has resulted in incredible improvements in managing Barrett's diabetes. After the event they chatted with GERALYN OCHAB of Inception (second from right) and BARBARA MILANA SCOTT of The Scarborough Hospital (right).

Families delivering babies at The Scarborough Hospital now have the opportunity to bank umbilical cord blood, providing a match for their child should they become ill and require a stem cell transplant later in life. The Scarborough Hospital announced its new partnership with Inception Cord Blood Program at an event at the hospital in October. The partnership supports the hospital's vision of providing the best healthcare to a global community. This new program is particularly important to Scarborough's many ethnic communities, all of whom are severely under-represented in international and national stem cell registries. For instance, the South Asian representation is only 0.3 per cent in Canada's registry of potential stem cell donors and the Chinese representation is only 1.4 per cent compared to 82.7 per cent Caucasian. Umbilical cord blood can be used for stem cell transplants.

Today, stem cell transplants help treat more than 75 life-threatening diseases, including a wide range of cancers, genetic disease, immune system deficiencies and blood disorders. Stem cell transplants are also being used to treat conditions such as Type 1 diabetes and cerebral palsy. "The Scarborough Hospital delivers more than 5,200 babies each year. We are now providing our families with the education to make an informed decision about the value of cord blood," says Barbara Milana Scott, Patient Care Director of the Maternal Newborn and Child Care Program at The Scarborough Hospital. "Our hospital serves an ethnically diverse community. Two-thirds of the Scarborough population are visible minorities and we feel it is important that our expectant parents know their options." The process is simple. The umbilical cord blood is collected by the delivering physician or midwife immediately following the birth of the baby. At The Scarborough Hospital, the cord blood can be transferred to Inception Cord Blood Program. Inception processes and stores the cord blood at a state-of-the-art laboratory. If needed, the sample is readily available for the exclusive use of the family. "We are partnering with key institutions across the county. The Scarborough Hospital was identified as high on our list because of the diversity of the community," explains GERALYN OCHAB, Vice President Sales and Marketing at Inception. "Children of mixed ethnicity are under-represented in international stem cell registries, meaning it is more difficult for those children in need to find a match." For Christine Ross, banking her cord blood after the birth of her first child has had an incredible impact on the health of her now 14-year-old son Barrett. Against the advice of her obstetrician and a genetic counsellor – both of whom felt it was unnecessary for her to bank cord blood – Christine decided it was an investment worth making. "We never thought we'd need it, but there was some comfort in knowing that we had it, just in case," says Christine, who spoke at the event at the hospital. "When Barrett was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes at the age of 9, I immediately started researching to see if the banked cord blood could be used in any way." Christine found a research study and Barrett was accepted. He was re-infused with his stem cells, and the results were extraordinary. "Today, almost five years later, Barrett is still in what is called the 'honeymoon stage' of the disease. He is still able to produce insulin. We were originally told by doctors that this stage would only last a few months, at most," says Christine. "Barrett is a normal child who loves sports and he is very active. He still requires insulin, but not to the same extent as would be expected had we not used the cord blood."

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