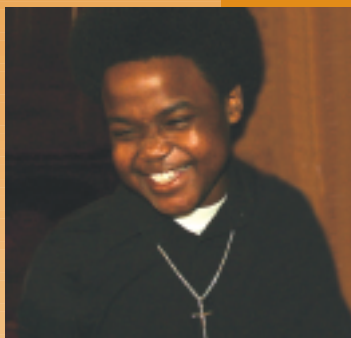


Cinderella Stem Cells

By Wendy Wright



Keone Penn

Keone Penn suffered a stroke at age five and endured excruciating pain and twice-monthly blood transfusions for sickle cell anemia. Unable to find a bone-marrow match, his doctors decided to try a cord-blood stem-cell transplant. A year later, Keone was declared cured. Last year, he graduated from high school.

"I want to hug the man who thought of it," Keone told the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. "I just want to give him a big hug and break his ribs and squeeze him so tight."

At 10 months of age, Heidi Tweten was diagnosed with a condition in which her body produced no red blood cells. She underwent monthly transfusions until age 20. By then, her body had begun rejecting the donated blood. Then her mother read about cord-blood transplants, where stem cells are obtained from umbilical cords and placentas immediately after birth and, as Heidi says, "There's no risk to the baby and a new life can be given to others."

Now, Heidi is off anti-rejection medications, has graduated from nursing school, married and adopted a baby boy. "None of that would have been possible," she says, "without God's help, a little girl who is now

7 years old, and her generous parents."

Henry's "body was literally killing him," said his mother. The newborn suffered from a faulty immune system, known as "Bubble Boy" syndrome. Treated with cord stem cells, he went home four months later "fat and healthy." Thanking the anonymous donor through *The Grand Rapids Press*, Henry's parents said, "They gave us back our son's life."

Doctors infused 12-day-old Sandrine Dion with cord stem cells to treat Krabbe's, a nervous system disease that usually kills its victims by 2 years of age. She is now a lively 4 year old. Along with 10 other children in a groundbreaking study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, she is an example of how cord stem cells heal and save lives.

While embryonic stem cells grab the headlines and evoke tearful pleas, adult and cord-blood stem cells are the Cinderellas. They are working hard, producing results desperately sought by patients. Yet they are hidden by the media and snubbed by some scientists fixated on embryonic stem cells.

Adult stem cells, which have treated 65 different diseases and disorders, are found in such places as bone marrow, blood and

fat. Cord blood has treated more than 70 diseases. In contrast, embryonic stem cells have proven too dangerous to attempt yet in human trials, and raise ethical concerns because extracting stem cells kills the embryo.

Cord blood is loaded with stem cells. They do not require a perfect match for transplantation, and work in all ages, from infants to adults. Young and undeveloped, cord stem cells are less prone to attack the recipient's body (acute Graft vs. Host Disease) than bone marrow. About 6,000 people have been treated with cord-blood transplants.

Yet no coordinated system for collecting and storing cord stem cells exists. Hospitals throw millions of umbilical cords away each year.

That could change soon. The Bone Marrow and Cord Blood Therapy and Research Act of 2005 (S. 1317) would establish a network for a national cord-blood stem-cell bank to prepare, store and distribute remarkable umbilical-cord-blood stem cells for treating patients and supporting research.

A controversial bill to spend federal tax dollars on embryonic stem-cell research forced its way through Congress last summer, the Stem Cell Therapeutic and Research Act (H.R. 2520). It was no-holds-barred for embryonic-stem-cell advocates. They made extravagant claims of what embryonic stem cells could do, and convinced patients and congressmen that their only hope lay with stem cells culled from embryos.

For example, the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF) brought in children to lobby, clearly swaying congressmen. The children first signed an oath stating, "If there is discussion on such controversial topics as embryonic

stem-cell research, I will either embrace the JDRF legislative position on such topics or will not work against the JDRF position."

Yet, the *National Journal* reports, "When asked about this adult-cell-versus-embryo-cell dispute, Van Etten [president and CEO of the JDRF] acknowledged the surprising advances made by the adult-stem-cell faction. 'There have been more promising results in adult stem cells than there have been in embryonic stem cells.'"

Concerned Women for America (CWA) coordinated with pro-life congressional staff and targeted wavering congressmen to expose embryonic stem-cell myths and show the successes of adult and cord stem cells. CWA's Project 535 volunteer lobbyists joined in our Legislative Department's Medical Ethics Lobbying Day.

Thankfully, the Bone Marrow and Cord Blood Therapy and Research Act passed the House of Representatives nearly unanimously! President Bush strongly supports it. The unethical embryonic stem-cell funding bill also passed, but President Bush vowed to veto it. As we went to print, the Senate was considering these bills.

While embryo research may be tempting, God has provided "the way of escape," an alternative that truly provides a choice of life over death. Just ask Keone, Heidi, Henry and Sandrine.

Wendy Wright, CWA's senior policy director, is an expert on stem-cell research and other sanctity of life issues.

Your gifts enable CWA to educate members of Congress about stem-cell treatments and to spread the truth through interviews on the news media. Thank you for your support! ■