

PRESS RELEASE

Children with cancer and Stem Cell Transplantation (SCT): recent clinical trial reveals SCT from unrelated donors is equivalent to sibling donors

Geneva, Monday April 2, 2012 – A prospective international multicentre trial has shown that matched sibling donor SCT is equivalent to unrelated well matched donor haematopoietic stem cell transplantation (HSCT) in children and adolescents with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia (ALL). These results are presented by Professor Christina Peters at the 38th Annual Meeting of the European Group for Blood and Marrow Transplantation (EBMT) in Geneva.

Although cancer is a rare disease in children and adolescents, there are 15,000 new cases each year in Europe. More than 60 different types of cancer affect these young patients. Tremendous progress with modern therapies has improved survival and quality of life over the last decade; however, one third of affected children will not survive. HSCT is one of the most effective approaches to control leukaemia, but the drawback of this treatment is the risk of severe complications, including infection, organ dysfunction and late complications such as growth retardation, infertility and development of another cancer. Since the first successful bone marrow transplant in Leiden in the Netherlands in 1968, more than 60,000 patients below 18 years have undergone this procedure.

Professor Christina Peters from the St Anna Kinderspital of Vienna, Austria says “knowing that only 20% of patients have a suitable sibling for SCT, we wanted to evaluate whether haematopoietic stem cell transplantation (HSCT) from unrelated donors is equivalent to HSCT from matched sibling donors”.

The ALL-SCT-BFM 2003 Trial illustrates the value of international cooperation. During the last 7 years, around 400 paediatric patients with ALL were transplanted in 27 participating HSCT centers in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, and treated according to specific transplantation recommendations and registered into a database. The results are the best ever achieved for this group of patients: not only was the risk of severe complications decreased, but also the recurrence of leukaemia was less often observed if compared to earlier trials. Professor Peters reports “the results from this trial are an important achievement in terms of curing the disease with improvement in the quality of life for both children and adolescents”.

About the European Group for Blood and Marrow Transplantation (EBMT)

The EBMT is a non-profit organisation that was established in 1974 to allow scientists and physicians involved in clinical bone marrow transplantation to share their experience and develop co-operative studies. The EBMT aims to promote all aspects associated with the transplantation of haematopoietic stem cells from all donor sources and donor types including basic and clinical research, education, standardisation, quality control and accreditation for transplant procedures.

For further information about the EBMT, please visit the website: www.ebmt.org

About the EBMT Paediatric Diseases Working Party

This is the biggest scientific network covering all topics on transplantation to develop better strategies for children and adolescents who suffer from life-threatening diseases. Nearly all European transplantation centers which treat children with stem cells (derived from healthy related, unrelated donors or cord blood) are members of the EBMT and register their transplants in a database, thus ensuring access to high quality research and up to date information on recent medical developments.

About the Paediatric Day at the EBMT Annual Meeting

To further increase the international collaboration in paediatric SCT, the newly created Paediatric Day has its' launch tomorrow with educational, working party, scientific and poster sessions.

Children are not just small adults, they have different diseases, complications, demands for care and attitudes for coping with their problems. They need specifically trained teams and it is the aim of this meeting to bring together paediatric hemato-oncologists, nurses and other healthcare professionals to focus on the needs of children and young adults who have survived paediatric cancer.

For further information, please visit the Congress website: www.ebmt.org/ebmt2012

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