



Shae Finnigan will donate the cord blood from her second child to Amelia, 3, when the baby is born. Picture: DAVID CAIRD

Families' cord of hope

Transfusion trial could give kids a new lease on life

CHILDREN with cerebral palsy could soon ask their siblings for a life-changing gift to improve their mobility and cognitive function, following an Australian-first stem cell trial.

Early clinical and animal studies have shown cord-blood infusions taken from the patient or anonymous matched donors could result in small improvements in motor function.

But with cord blood not often stored — and matched donors hard to find — Murdoch Childrens Research

BRIGID O'CONNELL
HEALTH REPORTER

Institute researchers are testing the middle ground: using a sibling's cord blood taken at birth and frozen for the stem cell infusion.

Children with cerebral palsy aged up to 11 who have a sibling's cord blood stored are eligible to take part in the first-line safety study being funded by the private cord-blood bank, Cell Care Australia, and the Cerebral Palsy Alliance Research Foundation. Participants will be

given a one-off infusion and monitored for 14 months.

Cell Care medical director Associate Professor Mark Kirkland said studies were emerging overseas suggesting stem cell therapies worked by reconnecting existing nerves instead of making new ones.

"We don't think it's direct repair, but these cells release active proteins that stimulate repair," he said.

Shae Finnigan will have her new baby's cord blood collected when she gives birth next month, through

Cell Care's free sibling storage program.

Like all siblings, there is a 25 per cent chance her baby's sample will match her daughter, Amelia, 3, who has mild cerebral palsy.

If so, she would be eligible for the infusion trial.

"The possibility of an improvement, whether it's 1 per cent or 10 per cent, is very exciting," Ms Finnigan said.

"Just to improve her muscle mobility and her epilepsy would be a big deal."

Professor Dinah Reddihough, the head of Develop-

mental Disability and Rehabilitation Research at MCRI, said it was important to provide families with evidence-based advice on treatment.

"Many families are going overseas in unregulated environments, paying vast amounts of money for stem cell treatment," she said.

"One does not know what type of cells they're actually receiving.

"They're going to places where it could be quite dangerous, so we need to test the safety here."

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Brown tells of abuse

FORMER Greens leader Bob Brown has told a court he was molested on several occasions by his choirmaster while a grade 6 student in the 1950s.

Dr Brown, a former a federal senator for Tasmania, yesterday gave evidence in the Crown case against Ian Douglas Davidson.

Mr Davidson, now 84, is standing trial in the Sydney District Court on 14 charges related to alleged instances of indecent assault while working at Sydney Grammar's St Ives preparatory school in 1962. None of those accusations involves Dr Brown.

Mr Davidson has pleaded not guilty to all charges.

The trial continues.

THE SHORT, FAT STRAW

SHORT men and overweight women earn less than those who are taller and slimmer — and it could be because of discrimination, experts say.

A study looking at the genetics of people who are short or overweight found they earned less and "obsession with body image" could be to blame.

Researchers at the University of Exeter found shorter stature led to lower levels of education, lower job status and less income, particularly in men, and higher BMI led to lower income and greater deprivation in women.

Windsor may stand

FORMER independent MP Tony Windsor will declare today if he will take on Barnaby Joyce at the next election.

Mr Windsor, who has scheduled a media conference in Canberra this morning, declined to say yesterday what he had in mind.

Deputy prime minister and Nationals leader Mr Joyce holds Mr Windsor's former seat of New England by a margin of about 20 per cent. A petition on getup.org.au has attracted 3900 signatures supporting Mr Windsor's return to parliament.

Mr Windsor retired at the 2013 election after 12 years in parliament, having been a key figure in keeping the Gillard minority government in power.

SUMMER'S SMILE SHINES FAR FROM HOME

SUMMER seemed to be a grumpy baby but when the bruises appeared, mum Hayley Gerke knew something was wrong.

Days after taking her crying daughter to the Launceston Hospital, Ms Gerke was with her in hospital in Melbourne.

"It was like my life stopped," she said. "We didn't know how long we were going for.

ALEX WHITE

"You don't prepare for these things. You don't know where you are going to stay. All you know is your baby is sick."

Summer was diagnosed with leukaemia at 12 months and needed immediate chemotherapy and a bone-marrow transplant, meaning six weeks in isolation in Melbourne and months of

ongoing care. Ms Gerke spent eight months away from home.

The Leukaemia Foundation helped find accommodation for her near the hospital.

But now the charity needs help. A Melbourne developer has given it the top floor of an apartment building opposite the North Melbourne treatment centre to make 15 apartments. But the

foundation needs \$3.5 million to make it liveable.

Foundation general manager Stephanie Hechenberger said: "Blood cancer can affect anyone. Treatment lasts an average four to six months, but for children like Summer, it may last two years. The Building of Hope will provide a home away from home."

BUILDINGOFHOPE.COM.AU



Summer Gerke with parents Hayley and David.