

Investing *for a* Healthy Future

*CellSafe stores cord blood to treat
future blood diseases*

By Brian Wright

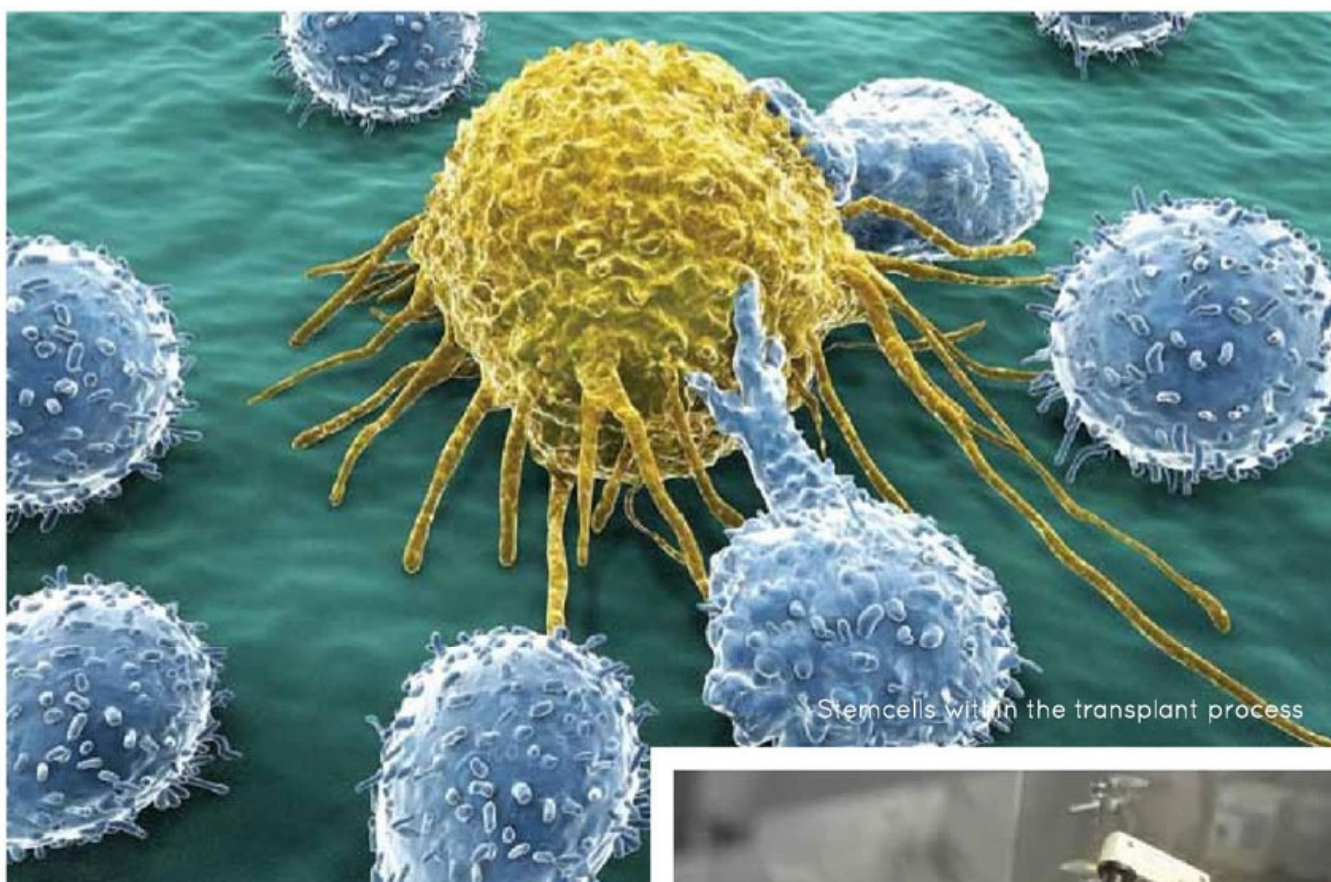


Red bloodcells

Preparing to welcome a new member of the family is a major task. From planning the design of the nursery to thinking about the right hospital and doctor to helping in the birthing process, there seems to always be more to think about. Increasingly, there are also a number of other future plans to consider sometimes as early as birth including what kind of educational and healthcare options do you want to prepare for your child. In the healthcare field, advancements in technology mean that new possibilities always emerge, and leading these developments in the healthcare field is stem cell research.

Although stem cell research has gotten a lot of bad press from movies and television reports talking

about harvesting cells from unborn fetuses, this is not the true picture. In actuality, there are a number of important diseases that can be cured with stem cells, provided that the cells given are a perfect match for the patient. Typically, these cells are collected after birth from the umbilical cord of the newborn baby and stored in a secure facility until they are needed. This is where CellSafe comes in, Egypt and the Arab World's first and so far only officially registered stem cell storage facility. With already more than 1,000 clients from around Egypt, CellSafe has gotten off to a strong start and has already cured its first patients, proving that storing stem cells can help save a life. To find out more, **Cairo West Magazine** sat with Dr. Sherif Amin, CEO of CellSafe.



Stemcells within the transplant process

CWM: How did the idea for CellSafe come about?

SA: The initial idea came from a personal experience. A group of friends and I had a mutual friend who was diagnosed with leukemia, and the only thing that could save him was a bone marrow transplant. We all helped and tried as much as we could but there was no match for him anywhere and he eventually died of the disease. It was such a tragic event for us that we were all encouraged to establish a place where other people could be saved, and this is where the idea for CellSafe came from.

It was a long process and involved a lot of hard work, but we officially began working in 2009 and have grown to do very well in our first phases.

What exactly does CellSafe do?

We are a professional, registered cord blood cell storage facility. Clients come to us when they are pregnant and purchase storage with our company. When the baby is born we take the blood from the umbilical cord, which in any other delivery is usually thrown away, and process the cells and place them in storage until they are needed.

We do not sell the cells of our clients; we don't even own them legally and are only providing storage. They are only for client use. We are also fully registered and licensed with the Egyptian Ministry of Health so everything that we do here is monitored, regulated, and fully understood by the authorities.



Stemcell experimentation

What diseases can these cells cure?

Basically anything related to blood such as leukemia. The stem cells from the umbilical cord are "blank," meaning that they haven't been assigned a task yet. Once they are introduced into the body, they are assigned the task of acting as blood marrow and then get to work taking the place of diseased cells. For example, one of our first successful cases was with a small boy. The parents had lost previous children because of a blood disease and had one healthy child whose cord blood was stored with CellSafe. When another child was diagnosed with the same blood disease, the cord blood that we had stored was used to treat the sick child and save his life.



Stemcell experimentation

Who can use the cells for treatment?

Anyone who is a match and the process works just like blood marrow. For example, you are physically made up of 50% of your mother and 50% of your father. Therefore, your parents could not use the cells because at the most they would only be a 50% match. Your siblings however, would have good chances for a match because they come from the same source.

How does the process work?

Most of our clients approach us during the first phases of the pregnancy. We start by holding an initial meeting, and providing our clients with a copy of the contract as well as answering all of their questions. We want to make sure that parents understand that this is not some miracle cure from the movies but something that has a real benefit and a potential to be even more in the future. Once the couple has agreed we provide them with a collection kit to take with them to the hospital about 2-3 months before the delivery. At the hospital, we have a doctor on staff who is there to assist with the collection. The blood is collected on site and then taken back to our facility for processing and storage and it is there until you need it.

Do I have to work with the hospital to make sure the collection is done properly?

Not at all. The only permission we require is to have our doctor available in the delivery room and take the collection. It is also important to speak with the OB/GYN to make sure that he or she is aware of what we are doing, but we will not work directly with them. You have to understand that the blood that we are collecting is usually thrown away after delivery, so when hospitals find that we are simply

going to take it off their hands they don't have any problem with us being involved.

How much does this cost and how long can the cells be stored?

Our basic package costs 11,500 EGP for initial processing and storage for the first year, and then an additional 1,000 EGP for each year. However, we understand that this is can be a large amount for some couples so we have provided payment packages that allow couples to pay 18,000 EGP and receive 20 years of storage, a major savings off of the base price. In terms of length, as long as the storage conditions are maintained the cells can be stored indefinitely.

As a final question, what are your plans for the future?

A big part of what we do at CellSafe is spread awareness, so we are currently focusing on getting the information out to the public so that they understand the real potential of this medical field and what it can do. We have developed a periodic magazine that talks about the latest news regarding stem cells, and we are working on a campaign to speak with doctors and inform them about this field and what it can mean for the future of medicine.

We want people to really understand that when you work with CellSafe you are not buying a cure. New advancements are being made all of the time and these simple cells that you are paying to store today could have entirely different applications in the coming years, in addition to the diseases that we can already cure with cord blood. I see this as an investment in the future, as a form of insurance that helps you be prepared for whatever hardships might come.