



Young Sickle Cell Patients Find Cure From Bone Marrow Transplants At Aflac Cancer Center

(NAPSA)—Bone marrow transplants are now being offered at the Aflac Cancer Center and Blood Disorders Service of Children's Healthcare of Atlanta in an effort to cure more children with sickle cell disease.

That's promising news for the more than 80,000 Americans who suffer from sickle cell disease, the most common, life-threatening inherited blood disorder in the U.S with approximately 95 percent of all cases affecting African Americans.

"Atlanta has the largest sickle cell program in the nation, and we treat more than 1,000 children with the disease," said Dr. Peter Lane, Director of the center's Hematology Program. "Our center has performed 18 sibling-matched marrow transplants, more than any other facility in the nation. Fortunately, all have been successful."

The process works by giving chemotherapy to eliminate the bone marrow that produces the sickle cells and replacing it with healthy bone marrow from a sibling. Because the procedure is associated with some risk of potentially life-threatening complications, it is usually considered only for children with severe disease.

Many complications in such patients can be prevented by treatment with the drug hydroxyurea or with blood transfusions, but only transplants offer hope for cure. Unfortunately, transplants are not an option for those with complications, because they don't have a matched-sibling donor. That's why research at the Aflac Cancer Center is exploring new approaches to transplants that



New treatments being done at a center in Atlanta promise a cure for young sickle cell patients.

may make the procedure available to more children in the future.

For children, a crucial element of coping with sickle cell disease and recovering from bone marrow transplant is the family. The cancer center recently received \$3 million from the Columbus, Ga., based insurance giant Aflac to create an endowment for a family support team. The team of experts provides medical care along with physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual support to the patients and their families.

Currently, 8,000 members of the Aflac sales force donate about \$200,000 a month to the center. The center treats more than 250 new cancer patients each year and follows more than 1,000 sickle cell patients.

To date, Aflac has pledged over \$20 million to the center. The Aflac Cancer and Blood Disorders Service facility was established in 1995 as a part of the company's core philanthropic effort.

For more information, visit www.choa.org/cancer or call (404) 250-KIDS.