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Medical Milestone Demonstrates Rising Use of Donated Umbilical Cord Blood to Treat Life-Threatening Diseases

National Marrow Donor Program® marks 3,000th unrelated cord blood transplant, more support is needed to help growing demand for transplants

MINNEAPOLIS – May 18, 2009 – Umbilical cord blood transplants are significantly increasing among patients with leukemia, lymphoma and other life-threatening diseases, according to the National Marrow Donor Program® (NMDP), which has now facilitated more than 3,000 such procedures, double the number just two years ago. But more support is needed – including increased funding and participation in public banking – to help all patients in need of a transplant.

The use of donated cord blood in transplant therapy – little known even a decade ago – offers an additional option for patients without a matched donor in their family. Physicians recognize that cord blood is a source of the rich, blood-forming cells needed by their transplant patients. In 2008, the NMDP facilitated nearly 900 umbilical cord blood transplants to provide patients a second chance at life.

Cord blood is collected from the umbilical cord and placenta immediately after a baby is born. After the cord blood is collected, it is stored at a public cord blood bank and the cord blood unit is listed on the NMDP's Be The Match RegistrySM. Patients and their doctors depend on the Be The Match Registry to find an unrelated cord blood unit or adult marrow donor. Because tissue types are inherited, patients are most likely to match the tissue types of someone who shares their racial or ethnic heritage.

"As a treatment option, cord blood holds great promise for patients, particularly those from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds," said Jeffrey W. Chell, M.D., NMDP chief executive officer. "Today, more patients can find a suitable match outside of their families because cord blood tissue-type matching does not need to be as biologically close as bone marrow for a successful transplant. And

because publicly donated cord blood is stored and readily available, it is particularly useful for those patients who need a transplant performed quickly.”

Recognizing the value of publically donated cord blood, Congress passed the Stem Cell Research and Therapeutics Act of 2005. This act created the National Cord Blood Inventory (NCBI) and provides federal funds to increase the inventory of publicly donated cord blood units. Earlier this month, President Obama requested \$12 million to support the NCBI in 2010.

As the federal contractor for the C.W. Bill Young Cell Transplantation Program, the NMDP oversees this process by serving as the nation’s Cord Blood Coordinating Center. In this role, the NMDP partners with public cord blood banks, including NCBI banks, to build a strong network and increase the inventory of cord blood units. These cord blood units are listed on the NMDP’s Be The Match Registry and are made available to any patient in need.

There is no cost to parents to donate cord blood to a public cord blood bank. Public cord blood banks cover the costs of collecting, testing and storing the cord blood units, so collections are limited to hospitals that work with a public cord blood bank. The average cost of this process is between \$1,100 and \$1,500 per unit.

Additionally, the NMDP collaborates with public cord blood banks to help educate and recruit expectant parents for umbilical cord donations. Today, the NMDP’s Be The Match Registry lists more than seven million donors and 100,000 cord blood units, including 18,000 new federally funded units via the NCBI. But while many patients do find the life-saving match they need each year, more publically donated cord blood units are needed to help increase the likelihood that all patients can find a match.

“The NMDP has seen tremendous growth over the last few years in the number of cord blood transplants we facilitate. Meeting the growing demand will require additional state and federal funding,” said Chell. “Additional state and federal support will allow public cord blood banks to accept more donations – which will ultimately ensure that all patients in need of a transplant have access to this therapy.”

About the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP)

The National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP) is a not-for-profit organization entrusted to operate the C.W. Bill Young Cell Transplantation Program created by Congress in 2005. As a leader in the field of marrow and cord blood transplantation, the NMDP manages the Be The Match Registry, facilitates transplants worldwide, conducts research to help transplant recipients live longer,

healthier lives, and provides education to patients and health care professionals. The NMDP is dedicated to creating an opportunity for all patients to receive the transplant therapy they need. Since operations began in 1987, the NMDP has provided more than 35,000 transplants to help give patients a second chance at life. For more information, visit www.BeTheMatch.org/cord or call 1 (800) MARROW-2.

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