



## Campaign Launched To Found Umbilical Cord Blood Bank



St. Cecilia Elementary School students hold kites they made in memory of Joanne Pang, a St. Cecilia fourth-grader who died of leukemia in 2003 at the age of nine. Dr. Jordan Wilbur (above), a pediatric oncologist, was among those to address a Nov. 15 gathering at San Francisco City Hall announcing a campaign to establish a northern California umbilical cord blood bank.

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St. Cecilia Elementary School students holding red kites they made in memory of Joanne Pang, a St. Cecilia fourth - grader who died of leukemia in 2003 at the age

of 9, gathered on the steps of San Francisco City Hall to mark the opening of a \$2.5 million fund - raising drive for the first umbilical cord blood bank in the Bay Area.

The Northern California Umbilical Cord Blood Bank will provide stem cells for transplantation into cancer patients as an alternative to bone - marrow transplants, which are in limited supply and are painful for donors and patients. Dr. Jordan Wilbur, a pediatric oncologist, said a quarter of children with leukemia cannot be cured because suitable bone - marrow transplants cannot be found. With umbilical cord blood donated by mothers, " We now have the potential to cure all patients, " he said.

Housed at UCSF Children ' s Hospital, the bank is expected to begin taking donations by early 2009. The goal is to have 5,000 or more banked cord blood units within five years, with an emphasis on extensive genetic diversity.

The Northern California cord blood bank, which is sponsored by the Joanne Pang Foundation, is seeking donations from mothers of all ethnic and racial backgrounds. For more information, visit the foundation ' s website at [www.joanepang.org](http://www.joanepang.org).

Cord blood stem cells were the first stem cells to be used successfully to treat disease. Like bone marrow, they contribute blood stem cells to fight blood cancers and other blood disorders. There have been about 6,000 unrelated - donor cord blood transplants worldwide since the inception of the technique, according to the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine.

" There is an increasing recognition that cord blood is a viable alternative to bone marrow transplantation, at least for children, " a CIRM advisory committee said in a June 2006 report.

Stem cells derived from cord blood show growing promise to make cell types other than blood cells, which would make them potentially useful in treating a wider range of disorders. Thus, cord blood stem cells could match some of the therapeutic potential of human embryonic stem cells, which pose major ethical problems because they are taken from human fetuses. State Sen. Carole Migden, who sponsored legislation to create a cord blood collection program in the state, hailed cord blood stem cells as a medical advance that circumvents religious objections to human embryonic stem cells.

In 2005, U.S. and British scientists reported the first reproducible production of embryonic - like stem cells derived from cord blood, known as CBEs. The scientists said CBEs are a viable research alternative with potential clinical applications.p> New findings in animal studies suggest that even after a stem cell has begun to differentiate, it is more flexible than previously thought, according to the National Institutes of Health.

However, a unit of cord blood contains relatively few stem cells. Scientists are working on multiplying these cells and are looking into their potential to differentiate into a wide variety of cell types.