



CORD connection

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Goh Koon Wei, 24, is now doing well because someone donated cord blood to SCBB
Photo credit: Singhealth.

The Joy of Receiving the Gift for Life



Goh Koon Wei, a cancer survivor
Photo credit: Singhealth.

"I was really shocked. I remember thinking I was going to die at a young age without having a chance to experience various life events! It felt like the whole world was crashing down on me and my family", said Goh Koon Wei who recounted the day he was diagnosed with Acute Lymphocytic Leukaemia (ALL), a type of leukaemia that affects the white blood cells of the bone marrow.

Koon Wei was an active and sporty 18-year-old when he was diagnosed with ALL. He had been feeling unwell for a month. Being active in sports, he found he was often breathless and started to bruise easily due to a very low platelet count in his blood. Most signs and symptoms of ALL result from shortages of normal blood cells, which happen when the leukemia cells crowd out the normal blood-making cells in the bone marrow.

Any person diagnosed with cancer faces a long and difficult battle. For Koon Wei and his family their journey started with endless rounds of treatment at the Singapore General Hospital. This was where doctors initiated the search for a suitable stem cell unit for a haematopoietic (blood-forming) stem cell transplant. A stem cell transplant is often the patient's last chance of survival. Every day counts when someone is waiting for a match, a daunting reality which Koon Wei and his family faced after the diagnosis.

In 2008, after four anxious months of searching, a suitable match was found in the form of cord blood at the Singapore Cord Blood Bank (SCBB). "We were all beyond relief, especially my parents. After all, finding a suitable match felt like finding a needle in a haystack," said Koon Wei.

Facing the unknown

Having no prior knowledge about how cord blood could help him, he did some research and discussed it with his doctor to find out more about the life-saving haematopoietic stem cells that are found in cord blood.

Koon Wei recalled feeling amazed and thankful, after learning that precious blood-forming stem cells can be found in cord blood which was previously considered a medical waste.

The transplant process drained Koon Wei both physically and mentally as he had to shuttle between home and the hospital for regular check-ups and from taking various medications. His immune system was so weak that even a minor flu could have severe consequences. He had a scare during his transplant when

he was almost admitted to the ICU as a fever he contracted refused to subside. Thankfully, he got better and subsequently recovered without any further complications.

Throughout the whole transplant process, his family and friends stood by his side and gave him strength to think positively and focus on things to look forward to after his recovery. Finally, in 2010, Koon Wei was able to return to school and back to his life as it was before his diagnosis.

While Koon Wei has been impacted by cancer, he is not defined by it. Today, Koon Wei is working hard to graduate from the Culinary & Catering Management course at Temasek Polytechnic to pursue his dream to become a chef. He also continues to keep fit and healthy, enjoying outdoor activities, including his favourite hobby, fishing.

Koon Wei's journey as a cancer-survivor has brought his family closer together and taught him so much about life. "During my time in the hospital, I witnessed life and death and it led me to realise how fragile life is. Before this, I used to take things for granted. Now, I appreciate things more. Not only that, this whole experience has also taught me how to be mentally strong."

Koon Wei is thankful for this gift of life: "My life changed after receiving a cord blood transplant. Without cord blood donors, I would not have the opportunity for a second chance in life. Their donations have brought a life-giving difference to my life as well as the lives of many other patients."

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“One scientific fact motivated us to donate the cord blood of all our four children.”

Ms Low Tze Hui, 35, and Mr Poh Liang Siah, 39, are no strangers to cord blood donation. In fact, they are one of the stronger advocates for cord blood donation – they are four-time SCBB cord blood donors!

They first found out about cord blood donation through SCBB's brochure when they were expecting their first child, Zaccheus, in 2006. One scientific fact in the brochure caught their attention, that is, cord blood from the family is not guaranteed to be a match should the need arise if a family member becomes ill.

“The fact there is no guarantee that my child's cord blood can be used by his siblings and that most patients found a match from a public cord blood bank made us realise there was no justifiable reason to keep the cord blood for ourselves,” Ms Low said.

“We also found out that with an increase in the number of parents who donate their newborn's cord blood, the greater the possibility of finding a match for those in need. We wanted to contribute to this effort therefore increasing the chances of a patient finding a match,” Ms Low continued.

Since their first cord blood donation, Ms Low and Mr Poh have been sharing the benefits of cord blood donation with their friends who are having a baby.

Ms Low stressed, “There is no cost associated with cord blood donation and the potential to save someone is priceless. I have shared this information on donating cord blood with friends and family who are expecting a baby. I have found that they are usually only aware of private cord blood banks. I tell them that there is no certainty that their stored cord blood, that is stored for the family, can be used if the cord blood is needed for treatment. I also share with them the benefits of public cord blood banking at SCBB so that they can make an informed choice,” Ms Low said.

Cord blood donation also holds another meaning for the couple, who recently welcomed the arrival of a baby boy in February 2014: the act of helping someone in need through giving. “For us, donating cord blood is like donating blood.



Photo credit: Singhealth.

SCBB life-savers (from left) Zaccheus, 8; Sarah, 6; Joshua, 3; and Luke, 10 months (not in picture)

I see it is an altruistic act and it feels good that our cord blood can help somebody in need,” Ms Low revealed.

“It is similar to how insurance works. When we buy insurance, the money gets pooled together. When someone needs it, the money can be put to good use. Likewise, if everyone donates their cord blood, the chance of finding a match is higher.”

Ms Low shared, “It is a sensible and rational thing to do. There is no cost to donate cord blood and yet it has the potential to save somebody. Why waste the cord blood? If everybody understood the logic behind public cord blood banking, I am sure that they would be happy to donate their cord blood.”

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Photo credit: Singhealth.

Ms Low and Mr Poh with their four children, who are all SCBB cord blood donors

The Joy of Giving

An easy decision - Forego a home birth to donate cord blood

Ms Izyani and Mr Mohd Nazri are another four-time cord blood donors. They decided to donate in the first pregnancy after reading up on the benefits of cord blood donation from brochures and newspaper cuttings provided by SCBB. They were amazed to learn how cord blood has the ability to cure blood cancers and other blood disorders and conditions. After this discovery, cord blood donation was an easy decision and they were convinced it was the right thing to do.

“I am so glad that SCBB took the time to explain the process and benefits of cord blood donation. After hearing and reading the details, I wanted to donate my baby's cord blood. If it can help someone one day, it is the least we can do,” said Ms Izyani.

After their first cord blood donation, she and Mr Nazri decided that they would continue to donate cord blood if they were to have more babies. Since then, the couple have had three more babies with their cord blood donated to SCBB.

Ms Izyani initially considered a home delivery for their fourth child. “I was contemplating having a home birth for my fourth child. The major factor that changed this for us was the regret of not being able to donate our baby's cord blood”, she explained.



Photo credit: Singhealth.

SCBB life-savers (from left) Haikal, 5; Danial, 8; Luqman, 1; and Irfan, 3

“After their first cord blood donation, she and Mr Nazri decided that they would continue to donate cord blood if they were to have more babies.”

SCBB has stringent guidelines and processes for collecting cord blood and is unable to accept any cord blood not collected within these strict guidelines and processes. Home birth, collection after the delivery of the baby and/or the collection of the umbilical cord blood falls outside of these guidelines and cannot be accepted for donation. This is to ensure the proper techniques are used in the extraction and preservation of the cord blood so that sterility is maintained and therefore will be fit for later use by a patient.

Ms Izyani feels very privileged and honored to be a four-time donor. She will be encouraging her family and friends to donate their baby's cord blood: "If doing such a small thing may make a huge difference in someone else's life, why wouldn't you want to donate your cord blood? It is easy and painless with the end result being your cord blood donation may be priceless to a family in need."



Photo credit: Singhealth.

Ms Izyani and Mr Mohd Nazri with their four children, who are all SCBB cord blood donors

A cord blood donor turned cancer survivor

Ms Pooja Kawatra Gupta and Mr Nikhil Gupta found out about donating cord blood when a SCBB representative approached them during a routine check-up during their first pregnancy. After further research, they understood the importance of cord blood stem cells, which can save patients fighting terminal illnesses such as leukaemia and lymphoma.

Ms Pooja shared, "I think parents do a lot of research online to get more information about their baby's development, parenting and more, including their cord blood banking options. We did too. We made this decision with the intention of helping someone who really needed the life-saving stem cells, and quickly decided to donate the cord blood instead of banking it for ourselves."

In 2009, when her son was only nine months old, Ms Pooja was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma. She went through a total of nine cycles of chemotherapy and other treatments. She went into remission a year later.

"That one year changed many things in my life. It made me a stronger person and I realised that every moment is worth living and celebrating. Your willpower and positive approach can do wonders in overcoming anything you face in life. If you've decided to overcome an obstacle, you can definitely do it," she explained.

Four years later, Ms Pooja conceived a second time. This time, although she was keen to donate cord blood, she was unable to do so due to stringent eligibility criteria for cord blood donation.

Despite her disappointment in not meeting the donor suitability requirements, she looked for other opportunities to support SCBB's cause. As the founder of Mums and Babies - a parenting group, she is constantly looking for ways to create awareness and to provide information about



Ms Pooja and Mr Nikhil with their children

cord blood banking options to young parents in her parenting group. She is also actively encouraging her family and friends who are expecting a baby to donate cord blood.

Ms Pooja said, "I recommend all expectant mothers to get to know and ask about their cord blood banking options from their doctors, hospitals and from online research. This small but significant decision can help save a life."

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Aayan, 6, a SCBB cord blood donor, with his sister Kaira

7 Steps to Cord Blood Donation

Step 1

Speak with your delivering doctor on the intention to donate cord blood.

Step 2

Call SCBB at 6394-5011 for a Pre-screening Evaluation to ascertain eligibility and suitability to donate. SCBB Nurse Coordinators will also arrange an appointment with you to obtain consent after 32 weeks of gestation.

Step 3

Meet SCBB Nurse Coordinator to sign Volunteer Information and Informed Consent Form and complete Maternal Risk Questionnaire (Family Medical History). This step must be completed before admission to hospital for delivery.

IN THE DELIVERY ROOM / SUITE

Step 4

Affirm Volunteer Information and Informed Consent Form in delivery room/suite.

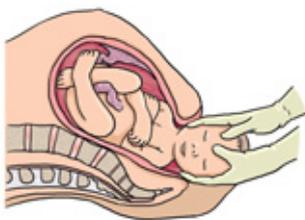
Step 5

Maternal blood samples are collected.

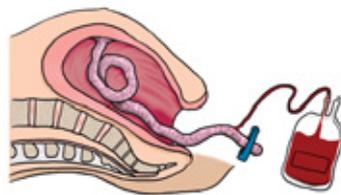
AWAIT DELIVERY

Step 6

After the delivery has been completed (i.e. baby is delivered, and the cord is clamped and cut), the cord blood is collected.



- Baby is delivered
- Umbilical cord is clamped and cut.



- Umbilical cord blood is collected from umbilicus vein.



- Takes a few minutes for the placenta and other residual matter to be expelled

Step 7

The collected cord blood and maternal blood samples will be sent to SCBB Laboratory for evaluation and processing.

Cord blood donation costs nothing. Receiving means everything.

Visit www.scbb.com.sg or contact **6394-5011** or info@scbb.com.sg for more information about cord blood donation.



For more information
please visit www.scbb.com.sg

Alternatively, you may
call **6394 5011**, or
email info@scbb.com.sg
with your queries and feedback.

Your baby's umbilical cord
blood can be collected at SCBB's
partner obstetric hospitals.

Please remember to contact
SCBB for an appointment
to complete the Informed
Consent and Maternal Risk
Questionnaire before admission
into the hospital.



Accreditation



Founding Members



Affiliation



Membership



Sponsorship

