

The Dan Berger Cord Blood Program

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The Lifesaving Potential of Cord Blood: Ryder's Story

At just 18 months old, Ryder McDermitt was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia (AML), an adult form of leukemia. After relocating about 90 miles from home to Pittsburgh for several months, Ryder and his mother, Karrie, grappled with the reality of his cancer diagnosis. Thanks to a bone marrow transplant, Ryder has been in remission for about one year. According to Karrie, "If it weren't for a cord blood donation, my son would not be here today."

When Ryder experienced numerous ear infections, easy bruising, arm pain, and high fevers, the thought of a cancer diagnosis never crossed Karrie's mind. After blood work confirmed Ryder had AML, he began the long road of cancer recovery at Children's Hospital of UPMC of Pittsburgh.

June 11, 2007 marked Ryder's cancer diagnosis date. For six months, he endured five rounds of chemotherapy. He went into remission in January 2008 only to face a relapse the following August. In September 2008, he endured more chemotherapy and radiation treatments.

The side effects of Ryder's treatment ensued with a vengeance. He experienced high fevers, reaching 104 degrees at times, vomiting, diarrhea, and other flu-like symptoms.

Shortly after chemotherapy and radiation, Ryder underwent a bone marrow transplant by Dr. Rakesh Goyal of Children's Hospital.

After about one year, Ryder is in remission. Periodically, he undergoes check-ups on all his organs because of their exposure to high levels of toxicity during his cancer treatment. It is possible he will face organ complications in the future. He also goes once a month for blood tests, and sometimes gets periodic intravenous immunoglobulin to boost his immune system until his body can make it sufficiently on its own.

Since nearly half of Ryder's life has been spent in hospitals wearing slippers, not shoes, his feet slightly turn in toward his ankles causing knee pain; he will have to see an orthopedist. "He gets out of breath and tires more easily now, but that is a small price to pay after what Ryder's been through," adds Karrie.

Karrie's stepdaughter, Veronica, recently delivered a baby girl, and broke into tears after learning the hospital did not offer options for cord blood donation. "She is a young mother who wanted to save a life," states Karrie.

Karrie is concerned women are not educated enough about their baby's umbilical cord blood and its life-saving abilities. Donating cord blood poses no harm to the mother or baby because it is collected after the baby is delivered. "You're bringing joy into the world, but you could also be bringing joy to someone in need."

