Cure: Cord Blood Transplant Aftermath

September 25, 2013 By Benjamin Ryan

Twelve-year-old Eric Blue, who had both HIV and acute lymphoblastic leukemia, died in July after undergoing the first-ever attempt to cure both diseases with a cord blood transplant. In April, a team at Minnesota's Amplatz Children's Hospital gave the Louisiana resident a transplant of stem cells extracted from the placenta of a baby carrying a rare genetic abnormality that confers natural resistance to HIV. Because cord blood requires less specific genetic matching than with a bone marrow transplant, the medical team hoped that using it as a transplant source could make a cure for HIV possible for more people with cancer. Blue died of complications from graft-versus-host disease, which is when the newly transplanted immune cells attack the body's tissues. Signs suggest that, had he survived, Blue might have been functionally cured of HIV. After his antiretrovirals were discontinued, tests (though still inconclusive at press time) did not detect the presence of the virus in his body.

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