



**In this issue: Cord blood transplants, stem cell clinics, flu shots, and more!**

## **Treating blood cancers with cord blood transplants**

For patients with leukemia or other blood cancers, blood stem cell transplants offer the best hope of a cure. Finding matches for bone marrow transplantation is very difficult, especially for those with a mixed racial heritage. A new technique using stem cells from umbilical cord blood is revolutionizing treatment for these patients. Cord stem cells are less developed than adult stem cells and don't have to be matched as stringently say researchers at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center. [Cord-blood donors can be found for 99% of patients](#) who cannot find a bone marrow donor. Learn more about cord blood transplants at the [Center's website](#). Read the results of their clinical trial in [The New England Journal of Medicine](#).

## **Stem Cell Clinics: Purveyors of miracles or snake oil salesmen?**

A [study](#) published recently in the journal *Cell Stem Cell* found 570 stem cell clinics in the U.S. marketing stem cell treatments for conditions ranging from sports injuries and cosmetic procedures to Alzheimer's disease and autism. According to authors Leigh Turner ([University of Minnesota Center for Bioethics](#)) and Paul Knoepfler ([UC Davis School of Medicine](#)) these clinics are engaging in questionable direct-to-consumer marketing of unproven treatments to vulnerable patient populations. The FDA is considering tighter regulations around stem cell treatments; currently they are not regulated like biologic drugs. Although clinics claim to harvest the stem cells from the patient's own adipose tissue, the treatments are not without risk and patients have been seriously injured. The [Knoepfler lab stem cell blog](#) offers a wealth of information about stem cells, treatments, links to clinical trials, and the list of all 570 stem cell clinics.

## **What is it like to live with a health condition?**

What is it like if you are a teen suffering from arthritis or depression? A woman who has terminated a pregnancy after discovering a fetal abnormality? A man who has been diagnosed with testicular cancer? The website, [healthtalk.org](#) presents videos of people sharing their personal stories on over 85 health conditions. The Health Experiences Research Group (HERG) at Oxford University interviewed thousands of people and analyzed their health experiences using rigorous qualitative research methods to ensure that the information is valid and accurate. Information on the site represents the "full range of experiences associated with a health condition." HERG hopes the site will also help people make informed decisions about their health.

## Walking Keeps Seniors Active and Engaged

For older adults, mobility is essential to having a good quality of life. New results from the [LIFE](#) (Lifestyle Interventions and Independence for Elders) study support the benefits of a structured program of physical activity in helping older adults remain independent. Participants in this study either attended health education classes or walked 150 minutes a week. Walkers recovered faster from disabilities and were at a lower risk for subsequent disabling events. Read [NPR's coverage](#) of this story. Visit the [NIH Senior Health](#) website for tips on how to make exercise a habit. For those who have started an exercise program [NIH Senior Health](#) shows how to measure your progress.

## Helping Adults with Sickle Cell Live Longer

For the millions of people worldwide living with sickle cell, a red blood cell disease, life expectancy is less than age 40. The goal of The New England Sickle Cell Institute at UConn Health is to "[help patients](#) better manage their health, reduce their pain symptoms and disease complication risks, and keep them out of the hospital..." The Sickle Cell Institute is the only dedicated center of its kind in the region, and one of a very few in the nation. In addition to providing comprehensive care for adult sickle cell patients, the Institute also focuses on research, education, and advocacy. For more information about the Institute, visit their [website](#), or call 860-679-2100.

## GoGoGrandparent

GoGoGrandparent is an automated hotline that lets people without smartphones call for Uber rides, or order groceries or medications. Users dial a phone number, navigate a straightforward menu of options, and order up the desired service. GoGo Grandparent is free. Users pay only for the services they order.

Sign up for [GoGoGrandparent](#) online, or by calling (855) 464-6872. The company will also let you [send a postcard](#) to your family member or friend explaining the service. Curious? Read more about Go Go Grandparent on [Tech Crunch](#) or [Back Channel](#).

## Brain Science and Marijuana

5 states will be voting this fall on legalizing marijuana for recreational use. What is the research on marijuana's effects on the brain? Because the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency classifies marijuana as a schedule 1 drug, few studies have been conducted. [Kaiser Health News](#) has an interesting story about what is known about marijuana's effects on the developing brain, on IQ, and more.

## Flu Vaccine in August? You Might Want to Wait on that Shot

This year pharmacies began advertising flu shots in August. Flu season does not typically begin until November and may run into the spring. Should you wait to get vaccinated? Maybe yes says [Kaiser Health News](#), especially if you are over 65. Although a flu shot in August is better than no flu shot, "...a combination of factors makes it more difficult for the immune systems of people older than age 65 to respond to the vaccination." Scientists have also reported that the shot's protective effects may "wear off faster for this age group than it does for young people."

## Helping Your Loved One Survive a Stay in the ICU

Although more older adults are surviving their stay in the ICU, most, according to [Kaiser Health News](#) will go home with "varying degrees of disability." Generally physical recovery occurs within 6 months of discharge; emotional recovery can take much longer. There are many things family members can do to promote a meaningful recovery from "being present" to arranging for services their loved one will need upon returning home.