

Healthcare industry BW

A milestone in the treatment of leukaemia

Blood cancer experts in the team of Professor Peter Dreger, Head of the Section of Allogeneic Stem Cell Transplantation at the University Hospital of Heidelberg, have achieved a major success in the treatment of leukaemia. For the 500th time, the physicians from the Department of Haematology, Oncology and Rheumatology (Medical Director: Professor Anthony D. Ho) transferred blood stem cells from a healthy donor to a patient suffering from leukaemia or lymphoma. The positive therapy outcome in a 66-year-old patient also demonstrates the suitability of the method in older patients.

For patients suffering from certain acute types of leukaemia, allogeneic stem cell transplantation is often the only treatment with the prospect of cure. The therapy, which has been successfully used in Heidelberg since 1997 on an increasing number of patients, was for many years mainly used for the therapy of younger patients due to the aggressive nature of the chemotherapy required prior to the transplantation of stem cells. However, over recent years the method has become less aggressive and is a lot better tolerated by all patients, including older patients or patients in a poor general state of health. This is of particular importance because leukaemias and lymphomas tend to occur in older people.



From left to right: Dr. Dr. Thomas Luft, patient Bruno Grimm, Professor Dr. Peter Dreger, Head of the Section of Allogeneic Stem Cell Transplantation. (Photo: University Hospital Heidelberg)

Patient with acute myeloid leukaemia receives brother's stem cells

Bruno Grimm from the city of Stadtprozelten (Lower Franconia, in the south of Germany) is 66 years old and was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia in September 2007. Without immediate treatment, this disease usually leads to death within a

few weeks of diagnosis. Bruno Grimm can therefore consider himself lucky to have been part of a clinical trial assessing the effectiveness of allogeneic stem cell transplantation in acute myeloid leukaemia patients over 60. In addition, a suitable donor was quickly found among Grimm's closest relatives: his own brother donated the stem cells. The transplantation went without complications – except for side effects such as nausea and vomiting.

"Practice shows us that allogeneic stem cell transplantation also has the potential to improve the outcome of chemotherapy in older patients," said Professor Peter Dreger explaining his experience. Usually, patients have to undergo chemotherapy treatment of differing intensity over a period of several months. Nevertheless, long-term control is often impossible, especially in older patients. That is why the physicians at the University Hospital of Heidelberg are working hard to make stem cell transplantation even more effective and better tolerable.

The Department of Haematology, Oncology and Rheumatology at the University Hospital in Heidelberg carries out approx. 300 stem cell transplantations per year and is one of the biggest centres in this field in Germany.

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