

First stem cell transplant on Chilean leukemia patient

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A middle-aged leukemia patient has become Chile's first patient to receive stem cells from an umbilical cord in a radical procedure that could cure the disease, health officials here said Thursday.

The 48-year-old man received the transplanted cells on Monday from samples stored in the so-called "Bank of Life" institute, said doctors at Santiago's Catholic University Hospital, where the operation was performed.

"Beforehand the patient received [chemotherapy](#) and radiation for seven weeks, and after a day of rest the [stem cells](#) were injected as if he were having a transfusion, through a vein," Francisco Barriga, coordinator of the hospital's Hematology and Oncology Clinic, told AFP.

It could take up to a year for the new cells to take effect, after the traditional therapy destroyed the diseased cells, so the operation's success will not be immediately known, officials said.

If the [leukemia](#) has not reappeared in about two to three years, the patient would be considered healed, said Barriga.

The Bank of Life has operated in Chile for two years, and holds some 200 samples of stem cells.

Barriga said the bank has the long-term goal of being able to provide cells for "whoever needs them around the world."

To reach this goal, the institute hopes to negotiate agreements with more local clinics to store the valuable stem cells from umbilical cords that are removed after births.

For its blood processing procedures, scientists separate stem cells from [white blood cells](#), freeze them at -40 degrees Celsius (-40 Fahrenheit) and immerse them in [liquid nitrogen](#) at -190 degrees Celsius (-310 Fahrenheit).

The samples are then stored in the bank awaiting a compatible patient.

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