Stem cells from cord blood could help repair damaged heart muscle

**Press release** issued 13 October 2011

New research has found that stem cells derived from human cord blood could be an effective alternative in repairing heart attacks.

At least 20 million people survive heart attacks and strokes every year, according to World Health Organisation estimates, but many have poor life expectancy and require continual costly clinical care.

The use of patient’s own stem cells may repair heart attacks, although their benefit may be limited due to scarce availability and ageing.

The researchers have found heart muscle-like cells grown using stem cells from human umbilical cord blood could help repair heart muscle cells damaged by a heart attack.

The study, led by [Professor Raimondo Ascione](http://www.bris.ac.uk/clinicalsciencesouth/people/personpages/r.ascione.html), Chair of Cardiac Surgery & Translational Research in the [School of Clinical Sciences](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/fmd/) at the University of Bristol, is published online in [*Stem Cell Reviews & Reports*](http://www.springer.com/life+sciences/cell+biology/journal/12015).

The study, funded by the [British Heart Foundation](http://www.bhf.org.uk/) (BHF) and the [National Institute for Health Research](http://www.nihr.ac.uk/Pages/default.aspx) (NIHR), found that it is possible to expand up to seven-fold, in vitro, rare stem cells (called CD133+) from human cord blood and then grow them into cardiac muscle cells.

The findings could have major implications on future treatment following a heart attack given that cells obtained from adults following a heart attack may be less functional due to ageing and risk factors.

Professor Ascione said: “We believe our study represents a significant advancement and overcomes the technical hurdle of deriving cardiac muscle-type cells from human cord blood.

The method we have found has the attributes of simplicity and consistency.

This will permit more robust manipulation of these cells towards better cell homing and cardiac repair in patients with myocardial infarction.

”Our research suggests that in the future stem cells derived from cord blood bank facilities might be used for repair after a heart attack.”

The study focused on a rare type of stem cells, called CD133+, which is also present in adult bone marrow.

There is also strong experimental evidence these cells derived from bone marrow may help with the regeneration of damaged heart muscle.

Professor Jeremy Pearson, Associate Medical Director at the British Heart Foundation, said: “Regenerative medicine research in the lab, alongside studies of patients, is absolutely crucial.

Right now, the damage to the heart caused by heart attack cannot be reversed.

Through research like this across the UK, we hope to bring our vision of mending broken hearts to reality.

“There has been interest for some time in the potential use of blood from the umbilical cord as a source of stem cells for therapy in a variety of diseases.

This study has shown for the first time that it’s possible to turn cord blood stem cells into cells that look like heart muscle, in the lab.

The results are encouraging, but there are still lots of questions to answer before we’ll know whether these cells can be used successfully for heart repair in patients.”

In 2007, the British Heart Foundation (BHF) awarded Professor Ascione, over £200,000 for the world’s first clinical trial, TransACT, to test whether bone marrow derived CD133+ stem cells can repair heart muscle cells damaged by a heart attack.

Recently, funding for the trial has been extended to 2013.

The double blind placebo-controlled trial has successfully recruited 50 per cent of its patients with no safety concerns.

Under Professor Ascione’s leadership, 31 out of 60 patients, who have suffered a major heart attack, have been injected to date at the Bristol Heart Institute with stem cells from their own bone marrow or a placebo into their damaged hearts during routine coronary bypass surgery.

**Paper:** [*A new methodological sequence to expand and transdifferentiate human umbilical cord blood derived CD133(+) cells into a cardiomyocyte-like phenotype*](http://www.springerlink.com/content/c0221013304t4012/).  Cui YX, Kafienah W, Suleiman MS, Ascione R.  *Stem Cell Reviews & Reports*, published online ahead of print, 21 September 2011.

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The [**Bristol Heart Institute**](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/bhi/) (BHI) is an internationally outstanding centre of clinical and basic science cardiovascular research that was formed in 1995. Since its foundation the BHI has expanded to 290 members across local Universities and NHS Trusts, making it one of the strongest cardiovascular research Units in the UK. The BHI mission remains to gain a fundamental understanding of the cardiovascular system in health and disease, to use this knowledge for the benefit of our patients, and to provide leadership in training the next generation of top scientists and academic clinicians. It also acts as a centre for public engagement, information, and debate; and as a source of advice for patients and policy makers.

The **British Heart Foundation** (BHF) is the nation’s heart charity, dedicated to saving lives through pioneering research, patient care, campaigning for change and by providing vital information. But we urgently need help. We rely on donations of time and money to continue our life-saving work.

Because together we can beat heart disease.

The **National Institute for Health Research** (NIHR) provides the framework through which the research staff and research infrastructure of the NHS in England is positioned, maintained and managed as a national research facility. The NIHR provides the NHS with the support and infrastructure it needs to conduct first-class research funded by the Government and its partners alongside high-quality patient care, education and training. Its aim is to support outstanding individuals (both leaders and collaborators), working in world-class facilities (both NHS and university), conducting leading edge research focused on the needs of patients