

R3 Stem Cell Scholarship

WINNING ESSAY WRITTEN BY LACEY L.

Never did I imagine that stem cells would become such a significant part of my life until 2020. I remember the day like it was yesterday, sitting in my office answering a random phone call from my father on a Tuesday morning. He had become sick suddenly and was referred to the hospital by his doctor after receiving his bloodwork showing elevated white blood counts. Our assumption, along with doctors, was that he probably had a simple infection and just needed to be checked by his nearest hospital to expedite the testing. One hour later my father called me to tell me he was being sent by ambulance to Charlotte NC and was believed to have Leukemia. In that moment, my entire world came crashing.

The hours turned into days, and eventually a week before we really knew the condition of my father's cancer. Immediately a bone marrow was performed, in which I was able to stay in the room to help provide my father some comfort. As a child, to witness your own parent in pain is something I cannot quite put into words. Within days a port was placed and extremely strong doses of chemo were started. I watched the strongest man I knew become the weakest in a matter of days.

After months of chemo, my father was asked to meet with his Oncologist to go over his recent bone marrow results and discuss the future options for his cancer. One option was to continue with routine chemo and look at a life expectancy of 6 months to 1

year. The other option was to perform a stem cell transplant that could potentially add many years to his life. As a family, we discussed both the pros and cons of the transplant, and to be honest, although it was an option, the outcome was also scary and unknown. There were many situations that could arise, that could potential result in death as well. After a few days of praying and discussing, my father decided to move forward with the transplant and the search for the donor began.

I always liked to think I was a strong and to be honest my upbringing was not the easiest. But it was not until the moment of realizing I was going to be the donor that my true strength kicked in. After testing multiple family members the results showed that I was the best possible match for my father. I was not 100%, but the doctors felt with my age and health that I was the best option we had.

I met with multiple doctors, advisors, legal counselors and nurses leading up to the transplant. I listened to all the possible outcomes, side effects and scares of a stem cell transplant. I also had to come to the understanding that my cells could also kill my father just as much as they could heal him. I believe that was the hardest part; not knowing the outcome and what would happen, what I may be responsible for.

October came with its cool autumn breeze and so did the start of the process for the transplant. After many self-performed shots, my cells were perfectly overproducing right on schedule. The day before the transplant, my body knew that too. I ached in all joints and parts of my body. A headache from (you know where) and anxiety that I could not maintain took over the night before.

The anticipated morning arrived and the words Neck-Cath were spoken to me. Awake and very much aware, I had my cath placed and moved into my room for the day. I think the hardest part during this process was having to do it alone due to Covid and the “no guest” rule at the Levine’s center. Although I understand, I wanted so badly to have the presence of someone I loved. I started to understand what my dad went through after months in the hospital alone.

I remember being in the room watching the blood leave my body and circle through the machine. I remember the love and positivity from the nurses and doctors. I remember the feeling when I got to hold the bag of my cells that would soon be placed into my father. I remember the overwhelming feeling of joy, hope and accomplishment for the small part that I was able to play.

I never imagined I would be saving the life of the person who gave me life. It has now been over a year and I happy to say that my father is alive, healthy and cancer free. I am so grateful for the progress in medicine and the ability to bring life to one from another through stem cells. I believe that stem cells will only continue to perform miracles in other various types of cancers, diseases and sickness. I also believe that medicine will continue to progress and focus on the possibilities from stem cells.

In my current career I am a sales manager for the personal care and cosmetic industry. My place of employment created innovative and unique raw ingredients for the industry and focuses on natural, plant based materials. We continue to see the advancement and ability plant stem cells are able to perform in various skincare

products. It is no surprise to me that plant stem cells are also able to perform at an exceptional level such as human cells.

Lastly, I believe that stem cells will continue to be used in medicine, specifically towards finding new noninvasive ways to perform healing of the body without surgery. If anything through my experience I have learned our bodies host the most incredible medicines and answers to so much. I personally have been blessed by this medicine and am so grateful for the progress and invention of such medicine. The human body is truly an amazing thing and I can only imagine the future miracles it will be capable of. In the words of Wayne Dyer, "Your body has natural healing capacities that nobody in the field of medicine can pretend ultimately to understand."

Work Cited:

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