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STEM CELL TRANSPLANTATION TRENDS IN PATIENTS AGE 65 AND OLDER

GRAPEVINE, Texas (February 24, 2014) – Just 10 years ago, older patients were typically considered ineligible to receive a blood or bone marrow transplantation (BMT) to treat their blood cancer, but today, patients age 65 and older not only qualify for BMT therapy but are the fastest growing group of recipients. This was reported at the American Society for Blood and Marrow Transplantation (ASBMT) annual meeting as it celebrates its 20th anniversary and reflects on how BMT therapy for the Medicare population has evolved.

Blood cancers, including leukemia, lymphoma and multiple myeloma are most common in people age 65 and older. These patients now comprise 25% to 30% of all BMT recipients, according to the National Marrow Donor Program and the Center for International Blood & Marrow Transplant Research (CIBMTR). The percentage of older BMT recipients is significantly greater than a decade ago when patients over the age of 55 were excluded from BMT treatment due to concerns for chemotherapy toxicity.

However, reduced intensity chemotherapy, improved supportive care and Medicare changes have made it possible for patients age 65 and older to obtain BMT therapy, which can be lifesaving. There are currently more than 100,000 BMT survivors in the United States, and that number is projected to increase to 250,000 by 2020 and 500,000 by 2030 with 25% of the survivors being over the age of 60, according to a recent study published in Biology of Blood and Marrow Transplantation.

“Being able to expand the use of transplantation therapy into the age group that needs it the most is a breakthrough accomplishment for our field,” said C. Fred LeMaistre, MD, president of ASBMT.

Yet despite improvements in Medicare coverage of BMT, Medicare has restrictions that still prevent some patients from receiving a stem cell transplant that could be used to treat their condition.

ASBMT, along with the CIBMTR, collect data to not only advance knowledge and treatments in the BMT field but to provide further support for Medicare coverage of BMT.

ASBMT was founded 20 years ago just as stem cell transplantation was rapidly emerging as a treatment modality, making it apparent that a scientific and professional society dedicated to the BMT field was needed. ASBMT has been instrumental in numerous advancements in the BMT field, including developing stem cell transplantation regulations and standards and starting and sponsoring the Foundation for the Accreditation of Cellular Therapy, an accreditation program for BMT centers.
The field of BMT began around 1970 when only a handful of medical centers around the world performed BMT. The field exploded in the 1980s and 1990s, and today, every major academic center in the world has a transplant program.

“Stem cell transplantation is an important part of modern medicine for the treatment of blood, immune and malignant diseases,” said Richard E. Champlin, MD, the first president of ASBMT. “BMT is still a rapidly developing field, and stem cell-based treatments and cellular immune treatments are going to be the next generation of new therapies evolving from the entire field of hematopoietic stem cell transplantation.”

The American Society for Blood and Marrow Transplantation is an international professional membership association of more than 2,000 physicians, investigators and other healthcare professionals promoting blood and marrow transplantation and cellular therapy research, education, scholarly publication and clinical standards.

The American Society for Blood and Marrow Transplantation annual meeting combined with the Center for International Blood & Marrow Transplant Research annual meeting is being held at the “BMT Tandem Meetings” in Grapevine, Texas, through Sunday, March 2.

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