

# MOODY

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When we face  
life-and-death  
choices ...

## PLAYING

# GOD?

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- ▶ **Mom**, are you **still** with us?
- ▶ Why it's **so hard** to decide
- ▶ Can stem cells **save my life?**

almost anything.

I found myself willing to try

THE DEBATE CONTINUES TO RAGE regarding the use of embryonic stem cells to treat various illnesses. Meanwhile, a procedure being tested at Chicago's Northwestern Memorial Hospital offers new hope.

Last year, physicians at the hospital, led by Dr. Richard Burt, performed the world's first adult stem cell transplant to treat Crohn's disease, an illness in which white blood cells attack the immune system. A second followed; and, according to Dr. Burt, both patients are doing "phenomenally well."

"Praising Jesus in heaven." I really don't believe I can continue this way for very long. After living for 20 years with Crohn's disease, I have come to a point where all medications have failed. Literally nothing helps.

It's hard to remember a time when I could stand up straight without pain or wear clothing snug across my belly without feeling I'm being cut in half. I can't sleep without a heating pad to ease the always-present cramps from hipbone to hipbone, can't remember the last time I wasn't up to the bathroom at least a couple of times during the night.

I have been fighting the flare-up that finally brought me here [to the hospital] for the better part of 7 months. I showed up for work many days when I could barely walk across a room. I have worked 12-hour days with a temperature of 101. When I brought in the statement from my doctor saying I was too sick to work, they asked for my resignation.

But I have been brought to a place where I now face the possibility of cure. This disease, which has dominated and finally stolen my life — this disease may very well be gone soon. The possibility is mind-boggling. I can't fathom it yet.

"The idea is to harvest some of the patients' own stem cells from their blood, deliberately destroy the immune system with chemotherapy, and then re-implant the stem cells and hope they will multiply into a healthy immune system," he explains. The research also shows promise in treating such illnesses as lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, and multiple sclerosis.

Yet behind the research are real people dealing with pain and hope — such as Kathy Duffey, a 38-year-old nurse from Arizona who has suffered from Crohn's disease since college. Here are excerpts from a diary she has kept as she anticipated being the third patient to receive the experimental treatment.

#### MARCH 2002

If anyone were to ask what I thought I would be doing at age 50, the only honest answer would be

# Can Save Myself

# Stem Cells



SO HOW DID I WIND UP HERE? As someone who has spent a lot of time fighting what the doctors call "a severe case" of Crohn's, I find myself willing to try almost anything to treat it.

My father in Illinois heard a report on the radio about a potential new treatment for Crohn's disease — a stem-cell transplant. According to the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the two patients on whom it had been tried experienced a total remission of symptoms. This, too, was different from any other report. I have read many that offer a decrease of symptoms, a lessening of inflammation, a greater or longer rate of remission, but never complete, never before a reversal. If this were real, if this could really happen ...

I could be free from Crohn's disease. This is what I have prayed for so long and so often. I looked for the flaw, but to this day I have not found it.

Anyone who has ever had a chronic disease knows about these reports. When nothing else is working, things like peppermint oil, aloe-vera capsules, fish-oil, baby food, and even tanning booths (it's true; they are supposed to increase the absorption of vitamin D!) look hopeful. But realistically, I have come to a point that, even when I try some new medication or treatment, I don't expect much to change. From the very beginning, though, this one felt different.

ONLY ONE THING HELD ME BACK from complete hope in this procedure. I am a Christian, first and foremost, before any other thing in my life, even before a "sick person." I had to ask: From where do the stem cells come? Could I consider accepting a cure at the cost of another life? I really don't believe I could. I realize that many people may benefit from the research being done today in areas that I may consider wrong.

It is possible that at some point I may benefit in some way from this sort of thing. I couldn't, however, do it knowingly.

I could not accept a restoration to health if it meant certain death to another. I don't believe that I could knowingly allow a human life to be destroyed so that I can finish mine in more comfort.

I think that I really believed this could happen for me at the moment that I found out that the stem cells were an auto-transplant — my own cells taken out and then re-implanted. This was the piece of knowledge I needed to allow myself to find out more.



## MAY 2002

Today is a day of wrapping things up here. I am still finding it hard to comprehend the progress, the changes in my health even while I am still somewhat weak from the treatment itself. The visit with Dr. Craig was almost more of a goodbye than an exam. He once again confirmed that the Crohn's is in remission and I am essentially symptom-free.

Listening carefully with the stethoscope to all areas of my belly, Dr. Craig finally looks up and tells me that my bowel sounds are normal. I am still processing that information as he begins to gently probe my belly for any areas of tenderness. As he comes to the lower right I prepare myself to feel the familiar pain — and there is no pain!

This is such an amazing change for me, a gift I had given up hope of ever experiencing. As best I can remember, this area flared up several months after my surgery in 1997 and I don't believe it has been pain-free since. I am at a loss for words ... there are no words adequate to thank God, Dr. Burt, and Dr. Craig for the gift they have given me. ■

*Kathy Duffey is a writer from Arizona. Amanda Widtfeldt is senior media relations associate at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago (nmh.org).*

ife  
By Kathy Duffey  
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