



CYCORD Cord Blood Bank's Journey to FACT-NetCord Accreditation

Interview with Juliette Liatsou, MSc, Quality Manager of CYCORD

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FACT is interviewing personnel at cord blood banks that are FACT-NetCord-accredited in geographically unique locations. We were pleased to talk with Juliette Liatsou, Quality Manager of CYCORD Cord Blood Bank in Nicosia, Cyprus. We asked Juliette to share her bank's accreditation experience with members of ISCT. She explained the unique benefits and challenges her bank faces in Cyprus, and why FACT-NetCord accreditation is important and necessary for quality cord blood banking.

The History of CYCORD Public Allogeneic Cord Blood Bank

CYCORD Public Allogeneic Cord Blood Bank (PACBB) is a public cord blood bank, and the first and only in Cyprus to receive FACT-NetCord accreditation. The Cord Blood Bank was established in 2005 by the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the Karaiskakio Foundation (the Cyprus Bone Marrow Donor Registry), ten Cypriot Rotary Clubs and the Cyprus Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

The Public Cord Blood Registry operates on a volunteer, non-profit basis as the Bone Marrow Donor Registry. The Cyprus Bone Marrow Donor Registry is accredited by the World Marrow Donor Association (WMDA) since 2008. CYCORD PACBB operates with the sole purpose of public interest and social responsibility. It collects and stores the cord blood units to be used by patients who are in need of stem cell transplantation and cannot find a matching donor. In 2016, CYCORD PACBB became accredited by FACT-NetCord.

Geographic Characteristics and Challenges

Cyprus's population is genetically heterogeneous with rare haplotypes because of the different conquerors of the island throughout history. The island was occupied by the Assyrians, the Egyptians, the Persians, the Rashidun and Umayyad Arab Caliphates, the Lusignans, the Venetians, the Crusaders, the English, and finally the Ottomans.

Cyprus has been divided since 1974 when Turkey invaded the north in response to a military coup on the island.

The island was effectively partitioned with the northern third inhabited by Turkish Cypriots and the southern two-thirds by Greek Cypriots. Nicosia, where CYCORD PACBB is located, is the last remaining city in the world that is physically divided, with a United Nations buffer zone between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot sections.

About 50% of marriages are between Cypriots and Non-Cypriots and the number of children per family is small. Marriage between Turkish Cypriot men and non-Turkish Cypriot/Muslim women are much more common than between Turkish Cypriot women and non-Turkish Cypriot/Muslim men due to religious and sociocultural factors.

Consequently, many Cypriot patients could not find a matched donor from the Bone Marrow Registry, which led to the finding of another stem cell resource. The establishment of CYCORD PACBB enriched the stem cell graft pool for the patients.

According to Juliette, “Cord blood collection is widely accepted among our population.” With over 125,000 Greek and Turkish-Cypriot volunteer donors registered, the Bone Marrow Donor Registry of Karaiskakio Foundation represents the biggest per capita Donor Registry worldwide. Additionally the blood donation in Cyprus has been on a voluntary, non-remunerated basis for almost half a century, and covers the total need in blood products.

“As for the cord blood collection, each year there is an increase in cord blood donations. More specifically, the number of the cord blood donation applications to our cord blood bank is 25% of the annual births in Cyprus. We have, at the moment, the second largest public cord blood bank per capita in the world, according to Juliette.”

The Path to Accreditation and Beyond

Juliette said, “Although at CYCORD PACBB we have followed most of the NetCord-FACT Standards since 2008, we were not completely ready for accreditation. We had to improve on proper documentation and traceability, and monitoring issues of the entire procedure from the initial contact of the Mother Donor until the engraftment of a cord blood unit to a patient at a transplant center.”

CYCORD PACBB considered the bigger challenge of the implementation of a total quality system as required by NetCord-FACT Standards to their organization. , Specifically the impact on personnel to coordinate and implement the quality management plan as well as maintaining the quality system after the accreditation acquisition. Moreover, individual challenges concerning the workflow, methods and protocols, equipment, and personnel, were also met.

CYCORD PACBB relies on a number of professional organizations such as the Pediatricians Association, the Gynecologists Association, the Cyprus Rotary Clubs and the Karaiskakio Foundation, as well as the Ministry of Health for organizing events for donor recruitment and informative session for prospective parents. According to Juliette, “We work in close collaboration with all of them so as to enhance public awareness on the issue of cord blood donation.”

CYCORD PACBB believes that transplant physicians and patients are more confident when cord blood units used in therapy originate from a FACT-accredited cord blood bank. Juliette said, “The FACT accreditation status of our cord blood bank would upgrade the quality status of our cord blood units and provide credibility to our methods. As a public cord blood bank in a small country, we were eager to pursue such an accreditation. Also, the NetCord-FACT Standards meet or exceed European regulations, local legislation, and are developed by panels of experts in the field. The Standards are updated regularly ensuring we are up to date in dealing with the best possible issues of graft quality.”

After working through the challenges posed by the accreditation process, and the inspection and approval by the FACT-NetCord Accreditation Committee, CYCORD PACBB was rewarded for its hard work and dedication and became the first FACT-NetCord accredited bank in Cyprus.

About FACT-NetCord Accreditation

The FACT-NetCord accreditation process is designed to be supportive, consistent, and objective. FACT and NetCord promote improvement and progress by establishing minimum standards, providing education, and inspecting and accrediting programs worldwide. Expert inspectors and the comprehensive accreditation program verify programs provide high quality cellular products and help to achieve desirable outcomes for patients. For more information, visit www.factwebsite.org.