



The Office of
Congresswoman
Jackie Speier

Representing California's 12th District
San Francisco / San Mateo County

Press Release

Contact: Mike Larsen (202) 225-3531 / 957-4340
Mike.Larsen@mail.house.gov

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Rep. Speier introduces children's health bills

WASHINGTON - Umbilical cord blood stem cells have been used in more than 14,000 life-saving procedures and every day researchers are finding new diseases which can benefit from this innovative technology. Yet, each year, 95% of umbilical cords from the 4.2 million births in this country are simply discarded as medical waste.

One of two bills introduced this week by Congresswoman Jackie Speier (San Francisco/San Mateo County) would go a long way toward changing this disturbing fact. HR 2107, "*The Cord Blood Education and Awareness Act of 2009*" directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop methods for better educating expectant parents about their options for donating or banking their child's cord blood. The bill also seeks to bring healthcare professionals up-to-date on the value of cord blood banking and makes grants available to reach crucial segments of the population, such as minority communities and families with a genetic history of treatable diseases.

"There are many important decisions new and expectant parents are expected to make, and whether or not to bank or donate their child's cord blood is an important one," Rep. Speier said. **"Without adequate information, that decision is often made for them and these valuable cells filled with life-saving potential are**

simply discarded as medical waste. HR 2107 provides parents with the information they need to make informed decisions.”

Cord blood stem cells have been used to treat both children and adults and show promise for regenerative medicine applications in the treatment of such diverse conditions as diabetes, brain injury, cerebral palsy and hearing loss. Despite this, a 2006 study by the *Journal of Reproductive Medicine* found that just 14% of maternity patients received any information on cord blood banking options from their doctor or hospital.

Speier’s second bill in her healthcare package is HR 2109, *The Childhood Cancer Survivorship Research and Quality of Life Act*. The bipartisan legislation was introduced with Palm Springs Congresswoman Mary Bono Mack and improves follow-up care for young cancer survivors by creating grants to establish childhood cancer clinics to provide comprehensive long-term care and monitoring of survivors. It also directs the National Institutes of Health to conduct research on disparities of survivorship and develop better systems of care and monitoring of survivors.

“Despite advances made over the past thirty years in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of childhood cancer, with 80% of patients surviving five years or more after diagnosis, it remains that surviving cancer is often a quest that never ends,” said Congresswoman Speier. **“This bill sends a loud and clear message to the brave young survivors that their country will give them the support they need to live as long, happy and healthy a life as possible.”**

Each year, more than 10,000 American children under the age of 15 are diagnosed with cancer. While medical advances have resulted in more than 300,000 childhood cancer survivors, a study by the National Academy of Sciences’ Institute of Medicine (IOM), found that more than two-thirds experience “late effects” of the disease that can significantly impair survivors’ health and quality of life.

“These two bills are part of a larger legislative strategy to advance the state of healthcare in America,” Speier said moments after introducing the bills. **“I have high hopes for the future of the healthcare system in our country. There is no reason to believe that the strongest, most technologically-advanced nation in the world shouldn’t have the best healthcare system on earth.”**

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