

Patients with lymphoma have similar survival after transplant whether the unrelated donor is matched, mismatched, or cord blood

What were researchers trying to learn?

Researchers wanted to learn who the best donor might be for patients who can't find a matched sibling (brother or sister) donor for a blood or bone marrow transplant.

Patients with lymphoma (a type of blood cancer) may need a transplant from another person (called an allogeneic transplant). Allogeneic transplants require donors and patients to have closely matched immune systems.

A transplant doctor's first choice for a donor is usually a related donor (most often a sibling). But some patients with lymphoma can't find a matched related donor. Researchers wanted to know if these patients should get a transplant from a matched unrelated donor, mismatched unrelated donor, or a donated umbilical cord blood unit (cord blood).

Researchers studied more than 1,500 patients with non-Hodgkin lymphoma (NHL) and Hodgkin lymphoma who had transplant between 2000 and 2010. They compared 3 types of unrelated donors:

- Matched unrelated donor
- Mismatched unrelated donor
- Cord blood

What did they find?

Researchers found that patients who had a transplant from a mismatched unrelated donor or cord blood did just as well after transplant as patients who had a transplant from a matched unrelated donor. For each patient, the researchers looked at several things, including if:

- The cancer came back (relapse)
- The patient got graft-versus-host disease (GVHD), a common complication after allogeneic transplant
- The patient was alive 3 years after transplant (3-year survival)

Researchers found that about 40% of patients (4 out of 10) were alive 3 years after transplant no matter what type of unrelated donor they had.

They did find some differences between unrelated donors. For example, patients who had a transplant from cord blood got GVHD less often. Also, patients who had a transplant from a mismatched unrelated donor relapsed less.

Important Point:

3-year survival was about the same no matter what type of unrelated donor a patient had: matched, mismatched, or cord blood.

Why is this important?

Transplant doctors now know that patients with lymphoma who need a transplant and can't find a matched sibling or unrelated donor can get a transplant from a mismatched unrelated donor or cord blood. This means more patients with lymphoma can be treated with allogeneic transplant.

What else should I keep in mind about this study?

The results of research studies are always limited in what they can and can't tell you. With this study, one drawback is that the people were very different. They had different treatments before transplant. The researchers also don't know what other health problems, like diabetes or heart disease, the patients in the study may have had. This can make it hard to know what the results mean for you.

Questions to ask your doctor

If you have lymphoma and are considering an allogeneic transplant, you may want to ask:

- What is the average survival for patients like me?
- If I don't have a matched donor in my family, who is the best donor for me?
- Is there anything about my health that would raise or lower my chances of survival?
- When is the best time for me to have a transplant?

Learn more about

- [This research study](#)
- [Blood and marrow transplant](#)

Source:

Bachanova V, Burns LJ, Wang T, et al. Alternative donors extend transplantation for patients with lymphoma who lack an HLA matched donor. *Bone Marrow Transplantation*. 2015 Feb 1; 50(2):197-203. Epub 2014 Nov 17. PMC4336786.

About this research summary

Ground-breaking research into blood and marrow transplant is happening every day. That research is having a significant impact on the survival and quality of life of thousands of transplant patients. But the research is written by scientists for scientists. By providing research news in an easy-to-understand way, patients, caregivers, and families have access to useful information that can help them make treatment decisions.

This information is provided on behalf of the Consumer Advocacy Committee of the CIBMTR[®] (Center for International Blood and Marrow Transplant Research[®]). The CIBMTR is a research collaboration between the National Marrow Donor Program[®]/Be The Match[®] and the Medical College of Wisconsin.
