Reading

1 Read the newspaper heading. What do you think the article is about?

A new life for Jassim

A young Emirati boy can now lead a normal life thanks to state-of-the-art technology and a great decision made by his parents. Jassim Al Ali was born with Beta Thalassaemia Major (BTM), a genetic blood disorder that can cause slow growth and problems with bones. Without any treatment, the condition leads to death.

Until his stem cell transplant, Jassim needed regular blood transfusions, but since his treatment he's had none and has now returned to school. The donor was his younger brother Salem. Forward-thinking doctors suggested storing Salem's cord blood stem cells when he was born, as they thought he might be a suitable donor. A decision, according to the boys' father, which has made a huge difference to the family's future.

'BTM is also known as the Middle East disease, because it's so common here, especially amongst Emiratis,' said the laboratory director of the Dubai-based clinic which stored Salem's stem cells. Jassim went to the USA for his treatment and his doctor, Dr Henderson, said that 'stem cell storage can change lives,' and added, 'I always encourage families to store their child's cord blood cells, even if there are no health problems.'

Scientists don't fully understand a lot about BTM yet, but they do know that a stem cell transplant is the only known cure and that's why stem cell storage is so valuable. Fortunately, the number of families storing cord blood in the UAE is increasing, because of the up-to-date facilities in the region.

Cutting-edge medical research is essential in the fight against disease and stem cell therapy offers a hope to patients with other life-threatening conditions, such as leukaemia.

Yet, despite the clear benefits of cell therapy, some experts offer a word of warning. According to Professor John Rasko of the University of Sydney, there are many clinics around the world which offer stem cell treatments for conditions such as hair loss and ageing. In the past, these clinics didn't offer medical treatments, but researchers say this is now changing as more clinics are advertising cell-based therapies for some medical conditions including lung diseases. This idea of travelling abroad for treatment is now known as 'stem cell tourism'.

Stem cell tourism is a growing worry for professionals who argue that the therapies are ineffective and some may even be dangerous. The far-fetched claims the clinics make are not based on medical evidence but offer false hope to people suffering from serious illnesses.

2 Fitness for life

2 Read the article and answer the questions.

1 What condition was Jassim born with?
2 Why were the doctors described as 'forward-thinking'? (line 12)?
3 What is another name for BTM?
4 What does Dr Henderson believe all families should do?
5 What is one possible reason for more people now storing cord blood in the region?
6 Who can benefit from stem cell therapy?
7 What are some health experts worried about?
8 What, according to professionals, is the major problem with stem cell tourism?

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