South African Bone Marrow Registry Update: 8 May 2020

The SABMR notes the updated COVID-19 restrictions announced by the South African Government as of 04 May 2020 which currently places us in level 4. With the continued restriction on international passenger flights and only scheduled cargo flights allowed, the SABMR will continue operating under the same guidelines as previously communicated for the lockdown.

Extended Typing (ET) and Verification Typing / Confirmatory Typing (VT / CT) requests

The SABMR will continue to accept all ET and VT/CT requests. Upon receipt, a health history screening (including questions on COVID-19 exposure) and an availability check will be performed on the selected donor and their willingness to proceed with a sample collection.

The SABMR remains committed to the safety of our donors and will adhere to the WMDA’s Donor Medical Suitability recommendations.

Medical Examination and Stem Cell Collection of donors

Such request will be dealt with on a case by case basis and will be dependent on the following:
• Donor’s health, availability and willingness to proceed under the current circumstances
• The Collection Centres’ or foreign Registry’s capacity to fulfil the request.

International donors currently in work-up

This will be dealt with on a case by case basis in collaboration with both the foreign Registry and local Transplant Centre.

Due to the ongoing travel restrictions and in line with our previous communication it is still recommended to arrange for cryopreservation of the product at the collection centre and the SABMR will then arrange for the product to be shipped as cargo to the transplant centre.

We feel it is important to share with you an alert received from the WMDA S(P)EAR committee of several cryopreservation-related reports. Adverse events included unintended (due to miscommunication) cryopreservation at the collection site, a cryopreserved product that was misplaced and hence partly thawed during transport, and PBSC or BM products with (anticipated) low cell count after thawing, where the product could not be used, or the same donor was requested for an urgent second donation.

To improve the process and avoid the risk of similar events, the SABMR will be following the WMDA recommendations as below:
• Agree and make clear written specifications about where the cryopreservation will take place. Transplant centres and sending registries should feel free to ask for accreditation certificates from processing facilities that are responsible for cryopreserving the hematopoietic stem cells.
• Assess the feasibility of the request of the transplant centre before collecting the product. Attempts should be made to determine whether it will be possible to obtain the required cell counts taking into account the potential losses during cryopreservation.

• Consult with the Transplant Centre on whether collection with cryopreservation remains an acceptable option for the patient.

• Ensure the transport is performed by a courier company specialised in transport of cryopreserved stem cells in dry shippers, according to accepted standards.

• Make sure that the site performing the transplant has implemented validated assays and test procedures for the evaluation of thawed cellular therapy products.

• If the post-thaw viable cell count tested on a representative sample is too low for successful engraftment, consider the option to check if it is feasible that the donor donates for a second time and combine the two products in one transfusion, rather than discarding the first product.

• Communicate the test results and if the cellular therapy product is used (including infusion date) back to the sending registry for evaluation of the process. If the cellular therapy product is not used, the registry must be informed.

• WMDA strongly recommends that conditioning not be commenced until the viability of the cellular therapy product is established using an attached segment or vial.

While many SABMR staff continue to work remotely and in the office, diligent efforts continue to provide transplant centres with safe and reliable stem cell products for their patients within the required timeframe. Please don’t hesitate to contact the SABMR should you require more information.

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