

Sorrel's mother's story



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Three year old Sorrel lives with her parents Samantha and Robert and her younger sister Daisy in Suffolk, where her father runs a gardening centre.

Sorrel is Samantha's first child. And she was a very active, bouncy toddler, walking at nine months and running about all over the place.

She was always running into things, picking up bruised eyes and bruises all down her legs. And they seemed to be taking a long time to heal. Her mother was concerned and talked to other parents who said: Don't worry. It's normal. Youngsters are always picking up bruises like that.

Then at her sister Daisy's christening, Samantha's father mentioned that Sorrel was very pale, and perhaps they should have her checked out by their GP. The next day saw 21-months old Sorrel transformed from lively toddler to seriously ill patient.

Samantha said: I took her to our GP and he was spot on, picking up on the purple pinpricks in the bruising, and sent us down to the local hospital right away.

My mother came with me, but we thought it was very minor, and then the hospital asked my husband to come in after work. It was taking longer than we had expected. Because I was nursing Daisy who was at home and being looked after they gave me a breast-pump.

Then came Samantha's most terrible moment in her life when they were told Sorrel had leukaemia but they didn't know what kind of leukaemia. Before they had time to take in the news, Sorrel was being whisked away at midnight to Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge.

It was the start of a whole year full-time in hospital. Sorrel had a very rare strain of acute myeloid leukaemia. Samantha said that most people die within months if their condition is not discovered and treated.

The family organised rotas to be by her side every night.

I remember going in to see her the first time hooked up to all those machines. It broke my heart. I asked myself Is there anything I could have done could I have spotted it earlier? But after doing all the research, there was just no reason why she got it.

Sorrel had wires attached to her chest, and even had to be fed through a tube at night when she was sleeping. Yet she refused to give in to hospital life, and she would run up and down the corridors still attached to machines - with her father pushing them behind her.

And she didn't watch TV, insisting on playing puzzles and doing jigsaws with members of her family and anybody else who wanted to pitch in.

After her first round of chemotherapy, she was so bouncy and bright, I thought she'd be alright. But the test showed she still had a lot of leukaemia left.

Mike Gattens, her doctor at Addenbrooke's, suggested another kind of chemotherapy and this time the infected cells were reduced to 8 per cent and that meant she could be considered for a bone marrow transplant.



Doctors trawled the world for a match. There was nothing in Europe or America but Anthony Nolan's international search located a partial match from stem cells harvested from the umbilical cord of a mother in Tokyo.

The next stop was three months in the Bristol Royal Hospital for Children and a transplant in early 2007. Afterwards, Sorrel was in a sorry state, putting on weight, vomiting blood, fighting infections.

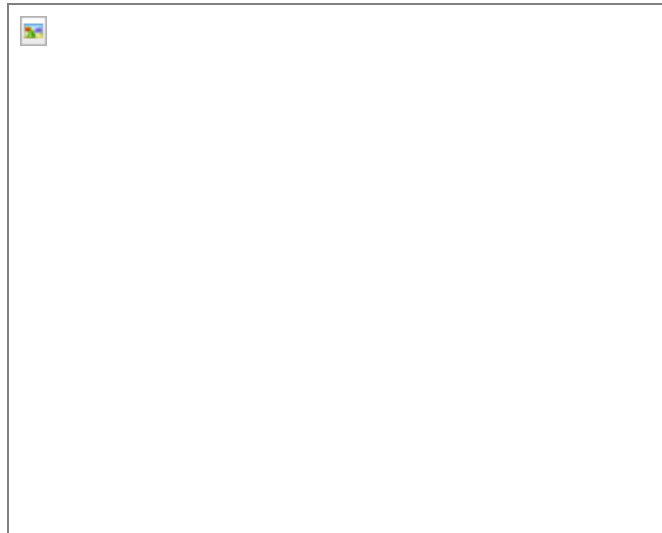
Every day we were waiting for the daily blood counts. It was a miracle when eventually they came up ok.

Sorrel doesn't realise she's been ill, doesn't realise she's even had leukaemia. She remembers the good things, and she's learned a lot. She remembers playing with all the people in the hospital.

Having said that, she became a medical expert all by herself, counting off the 15 drugs she had to have each morning after leaving hospital.

Samantha concluded: I feel humbled, and very lucky and blessed that we found a donor. Sorrel is only the second person in Britain to have received cord blood stem cells from Japan.

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