

Transplant offers renewed hope for Peoria girl

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For Bella, a young Peoria girl who was born with a rare and deadly blood disease, it will be the best of possible birthday presents - the gift of life.

On Aug. 15, just three days after her third birthday, Bella is scheduled for a second bone marrow transplant that offers her and her worried parents the chance of a normal life.

"We feel both good and afraid for our daughter," said Xay Pravongviengkham, 31, the child's father. "We've got lots of things going through our minds right now."



Bella's father and mother, Vahn, 26, have staked their hopes on a permanent cure for their fetching little girl who loves to sing and dance.

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Her favorite song is *Against All Odds* by Phil Collins, a song that perhaps sums up Bella's life, the father said.

An earlier transplant failed to take hold last year, meaning that Bella was back on the monthly blood transfusions needed to maintain her life.

This time, doctors have found a bone marrow donor with a 90 match with Bella, unlike the 80 percent match for last year's transplant.

"So we're moving ahead with a second transplant," said Dr. Roberta Adams, the bone marrow transplant director at Phoenix Children's Hospital and Mayo Clinic Arizona.

Doctors will take aggressive medical action in trying to make the second transplant the charm for Bella, Adams said.

"We're using a different approach this time," Adams said. "We will hope to know within two

or three months how things worked out."

Treatments for Bella started long before she was born. She began receiving transfusions as a 4-month-old fetus after doctors diagnosed her blood disorder.

They determined she has alpha thalasemia, a genetic defect that affects the production of hemoglobin, the protein that enables red blood cells to carry oxygen throughout the body.

The hope is that a bone marrow transplant will help Bella start producing normal cells.

In transplant therapy, the donor stem cells are placed into a patient's bloodstream.

The stem cells migrate into the bone marrow and, hopefully, begin producing new and healthy blood cells.

A donor for Bella was found after a screening drive in May, but privacy laws prevent doctors from offering information about the donor.

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