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Contact: Mary Uhlig

Mary.Uhlig@biobridgeglobal.org

210-731-5519

San Antonio biomedical organization collects first cell donation on one-of-a-kind bus

BBG Advanced Therapies vehicle to help enable lifesaving new treatments for patients in San Antonio and South Texas

SAN ANTONIO – The world’s only mobile cell therapy collection vehicle recorded its first donation on Monday, marking the beginning of a new era for healthcare in South Texas.

The BBG Advanced Therapies mobile cell collection bus, the first of its kind in the world, can help improve access to lifesaving treatments across a 63,000-square mile area currently underserved by next-generation advanced therapies.

BBG Advanced Therapies is a subsidiary of San Antonio-based nonprofit BioBridge Global, which also is the parent organization of South Texas Blood & Tissue and QualTex Laboratories. The concept for a mobile cell collection vehicle was built on the organization’s legacy of blood donations on “blood buses.”

Cell collection on the new vehicle is done through a process called leukapheresis, which collects certain types of white blood cells from the bloodstream, then returns the rest of the blood components to the donor.

Creating a new generation of treatments

Immune cells collected from donors in the mobile leukapheresis center – and by early next year, also from patients - are used by therapeutic developers to create personalized therapies that help patients heal using the power of their own immune systems.

These cells are being developed for the treatment of blood cancers, solid tumors, autoimmune conditions, and others. The process involves “training” cells from patients or donors to identify and kill cancer cells, or treat genetic disorders and other serious illnesses with targeted treatment.

More than 30 “advanced therapies” have been approved by the FDA in recent years. Currently, access to advanced therapies is limited, as patients often have to travel long distances to academic research centers in other major metro areas.

“In a region the size of South Texas, providing patient or donor access to these kinds of lifesaving therapies can be difficult,” said Adrienne Mendoza, Chief Operating Officer, BBG Advanced Therapies. “We believe that bringing this option to our service area can help make cutting-edge healthcare available to many, many more patients who need it.”

The first donor on the mobile leukapheresis center was Simon Hart, a 32-year-old Air Force veteran and a master’s degree candidate in kinesiology at UTSA.

Hart has been donating blood since he was 16, thanks to his father’s influence. Nowadays, he gives in honor of his father, who died from cancer earlier this year.

“Everything I do from here on out is for him,” Hart said.

More on the mobile leukapheresis center

The self-contained mobile leukapheresis center includes two cell collection stations and a testing laboratory.

Patients or donors undergo collections in the comfort of a reclining chair and are provided with a choice of entertainment options during the process, including TV, movies and music. The mobile leukapheresis center also is equipped with a wheelchair lift and onboard lavatory for comfort and accessibility.

The mobile center is staffed by experienced members of the BBG Advanced Therapies apheresis team. BioBridge Global has been operating an onsite center for collecting cells for therapies and research for more than 15 years.

Just a handful of fixed-site centers in Texas are equipped to collect immune cells, and they are concentrated in the state’s major metropolitan areas. The mobile leukapheresis center will widen the scope of these new advanced therapies and strengthen the healthcare ecosystem in San Antonio and South Texas.

“Just like our blood bus in 1974 brought donation opportunities into the community, this vehicle brings cell collections directly to patients,” Mendoza said. “This makes what was once limited to special centers accessible to everyone everywhere.”

“Our new mobile leukapheresis offering is another innovative step in our efforts to support biotherapeutic breakthroughs,” said Martin Landon, Chief Executive Officer, BioBridge Global, “thereby improving patient care and expanding our mission to save and enhance lives through the healing power of human cells and tissue.”

Anyone interested in joining the registry to potentially serve as a cell donor can sign up at <https://biobridgeglobal.org/donors/donor-registry>.

Video interviews of Adrienne Mendoza and Simon Hart are in this folder, along with photos from the donation and the news conference:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/t8vber4cuvwqzue8nabg6/AKDaNh1obAlNBvJSDJeNceA?rlkey=hj0chmmfun43115pgsj8531i1&st=ww7m496u&dl=0>

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About BioBridge Global: BioBridge Global is a San Antonio-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit healthcare services enterprise that offers diverse services through its nonprofit subsidiaries – South Texas Blood & Tissue, QualTex Laboratories, BBG Advanced Therapies and The Blood & Tissue Center Foundation. BioBridge Global provides products and services in blood resource management, cellular therapy, donated umbilical cord blood and human tissue, as well as testing of blood, plasma and tissue products for clients in the United States and worldwide. The enterprise enables advances in the field of regenerative medicine and advanced therapies by providing access to starting materials, testing services and biomanufacturing and clinical trials support. BioBridge Global is committed to saving and enhancing lives through the healing power of human cells and tissue. Learn more at BioBridgeGlobal.org.

About BBG Advanced Therapies: The newest subsidiary of San Antonio-based nonprofit BioBridge Global, BBG Advanced Therapies provides innovative and custom solutions to accelerate the development of cell and gene therapies. BBG Advanced Therapies features a fully integrated and custom portfolio of innovative solutions, including collection and processing of starting materials, testing, clinical trials support, and biomanufacturing services. Learn more at BBGAdvancedTherapies.org.



Adrienne Mendoza, Chief Operating Officer, BBG Advanced Therapies, speaks at Wednesday's news conference announcing the first collection.



Simon Hart makes his cell donation in the mobile leukapheresis center on Monday.