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Review Paper

Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplantation: Rebuilding the Blood and Immune System Through Cellular Therapy

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Citation: Tighiouart E, Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplantation: Rebuilding the Blood and Immune System Through Cellular Therapy V2(2), 2026

Received date: May 29, 2026: **Accepted date:** June 19, 2026: **Published date**: June 30 ,2026
Keywords: hematopoietic stem cell transplantation, hsct, bone marrow transplantation, autologous transplantation, allogeneic transplantation, graft-versus-host disease, stem cells, hematologic malignancy

Abstract

Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplantation (HSCT) is a transformative cellular therapy used to restore or replace damaged hematopoietic and immune systems in patients with serious blood disorders, malignancies, and selected inherited or immune-mediated diseases. The procedure involves the administration of hematopoietic stem cells obtained either from the patient or from a suitable donor following conditioning therapy. Depending on the clinical situation, transplantation may be classified as autologous, allogeneic, or syngeneic. Advances in donor selection, human leukocyte antigen matching, conditioning strategies, graft manipulation, infection prevention, and supportive care have substantially expanded the clinical applications of HSCT. Nevertheless, transplantation remains a complex procedure associated with significant complications, including graft-versus-host disease infections, graft failure, organ toxicity, and disease relapse. Long-term management also requires attention to immune recovery, secondary malignancies, fertility, psychosocial well-being, and quality of life. This article reviews the fundamental principles of HSCT, major transplantation approaches, indications, donor selection, conditioning, transplantation procedures, complications, post-transplant care, and emerging developments. Understanding these components is essential for healthcare professionals involved in the multidisciplinary management of transplant recipients.

Introduction

Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplantation (HSCT) is a medical procedure in which hematopoietic stem cells are infused into a patient to restore hematopoiesis and immune function. Although commonly associated with bone marrow transplantation, hematopoietic stem cells can be collected from bone marrow, peripheral blood, or umbilical cord blood.

.HSCT has become an important treatment modality for several hematological malignancies and nonmalignant disorders. The fundamental principle is to replace diseased or severely damaged blood-forming tissue with healthy hematopoietic stem cells. In allogeneic transplantation, an additional therapeutic effect can occur when donor immune cells recognize and attack malignant cells, known as the graft-versus-tumor or graft-versus-leukemia effect.

Major Types of HSCT

Autologous HSCT

In an autologous transplant, the patient's own stem cells are collected and stored before high-dose therapy. After conditioning or intensive treatment, the cells are returned to the patient

A simplified sequence is:

Stem-cell mobilization → Collection → Cryopreservation → Conditioning therapy → Stem-cell infusion → Hematopoietic recovery

Autologous transplantation is frequently used in selected hematological malignancies, including multiple myeloma and certain lymphomas.

Because the patient's own cells are used, graft-versus-host disease is not a typical complication. However, disease relapse remains an important concern because the transplanted cells originate from the patient.

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Allogeneic HSCT

In allogeneic transplantation, stem cells come from another individual. The donor may be:

- A matched sibling
- A matched unrelated donor
- A haploidentical related donor
- A cord-blood donor

Allogeneic HSCT can provide an important immune-mediated antitumor effect. However, donor immune cells may also attack healthy recipient tissues, producing graft-versus-host disease (GVHD).

Stem-Cell Sources

Hematopoietic stem cells can be obtained from three principal sources.

Bone Marrow

Bone marrow collection is generally performed under anesthesia, with stem cells obtained from the donor's pelvic bones.

Peripheral Blood

Peripheral blood stem-cell collection is widely used. The donor receives medication to increase the number of circulating hematopoietic stem cells, after which the cells are collected through a process called apheresis

Umbilical Cord Blood

Umbilical cord blood collected after delivery can contain hematopoietic stem cells. Cord blood can be particularly useful when a suitably matched adult donor cannot readily be identified, although cell-dose and engraftment considerations are important

Recent Developments and Future Directions

HSCT continues to evolve through improvements in transplantation biology and supportive care.

Important areas of development include:

Improved donor selection

Advances in HLA typing and donor registries have expanded access to transplantation for patients without a fully matched sibling donor.

Haploidentical transplantation

Haploidentical transplantation uses a donor who is partially HLA matched, often a close family member. Advances in GVHD prevention have increased the feasibility of this approach

Reduced-intensity conditioning

Reduced-intensity approaches have expanded transplantation options for selected older or medically vulnerable patients.

Cellular and immune therapies

HSCT increasingly intersects with other cellular therapies, including engineered immune-cell approaches. These developments are changing the broader treatment landscape for hematological cancers

Precision medicine

Molecular and genetic information can help refine disease classification, risk assessment, treatment selection, and post-transplant surveillance.

Conclusion

Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplantation represents a complex but important therapeutic strategy for selected malignant and nonmalignant disorders. Its effectiveness depends on careful patient selection, appropriate donor identification, conditioning therapy, successful stem-cell engraftment, infection prevention, complication management, and long-term follow-up.The field has progressed from conventional bone marrow transplantation toward sophisticated cellular therapy involving improved donor strategies, refined conditioning regimens, immune modulation, and molecularly informed treatment. Despite these advances, complications such as GVHD, infection, graft failure, organ toxicity, and disease relapse continue to require careful management.

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