Clarion Review

Health & Fitness

How Adult Stem Cell Therapies Can Save Your Life: Medicine's Best-Kept Secret Saved My Life

Bernard van Zyl
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Four Stars (out of Five)

For some patients, the political and moral debates surrounding medical uses of embryonic stem cells may now be irrelevant. Ongoing research shows that the human body continues to produce stem cells that can be harvested and used to repair itself.

Van Zyl was sixty-seven when, during a physical examination, he suffered a heart attack massive enough that it would probably have killed him had he not already been in a hospital. Over the next several years, treatment after treatment failed to bring lasting relief from congestive heart failure.

After being rejected by two centers for a heart transplant—his cardiologist's last resort—the author dedicated his waning energy to taking charge of his own healthcare. His research led him to a clinical trial in which volunteers whose severe heart disease could not be controlled through traditional means were treated with injections of their own stem cells.

Now fully recovered, van Zyl has become an advocate for stem cell therapy, and serves as senior researcher and CEO of Clinical Trial Locator.

"Our doctors do everything within their power to alleviate our suffering, but they are limited to therapies that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved for general use," he explains. "Surprisingly, physicians are not likely to know about all of the advanced treatments that are in clinical trials in hospitals and laboratories around the world."

How Adult Stem Cell Therapies Can Save Your Life is part autobiography, part practical guide to finding and evaluating clinical trials. These two themes are well-balanced, with just enough of the author's personal story to make his message relatable. He uses his own experience with navigating the world of medicine (a journey that he, like most patients, had to make while coping with devastating illness) to alert readers to what they can expect along the way.

Van Zyl doesn't assume everyone reading his book is medically or technologically savvy; there's a chapter on using the Internet as a research tool, for example, that demythologizes search engines. Medical terms are explained at first reference, and there's a glossary included for quick referral.

The book is attractively packaged, with a picture of the author, now in his seventies and looking very robust, that gives credence to his claims of restored health. The text suffers from editorial inattention; glitches like the chronic use of "Pepsid" for "Pepcid" can be irritating.

Van Zyl succeeds in conveying a straightforward message of hope for patients who have been abandoned by established medicine. Clinical trials of cutting-edge treatments using stem cells produced by one's own body may hold the key to recovery, he says. Here's how to find them.