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Apheresis-Specialty Therapies: Caring for People

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# Apheresis-Specialty Therapies

## *Caring for People*

By Isagani Marquez BSN, RN

UC San Diego Medical Center is the only therapeutic apheresis out patient unit in San Diego and has been providing cutting-edge therapies for over 25 years. These therapies are extracorporeal treatments. Utilizing advanced technology the program also participates in research through the collection and analyses of cellular components.

Among the first treatments that we provided was plasmapheresis; a process in which plasma components are removed from blood by a centrifuge, such as antibodies, that can cause autoimmune diseases. Diagnoses in which plasmapheresis is commonly used are Myasthenia Gravis, Chronic Idiopathic Polyradiculopathy, Waldenstroms Macroglobulinemia, Gullian-Barre Syndrome, and Thrombotic Thrombocytopenia Purpura. New indications for use of plasmapheresis continually arise and seem to be growing rapidly.

We also provide therapeutic cytapheresis: the process of removing the targeted cellular components from blood and returning plasma and the other cellular components. This involves white blood cell depletion, platelet depletion, or a red blood cell exchange. These therapies are not common, but when needed, our nurses are skilled and ready. We have evolved providing for other modalities as well. Such therapies that are provided are Photopheresis, which modulates cellular immunity towards tolerance in which the plasma, containing the leukocytes

or white blood cells, is removed from the body and treated with ultraviolet light. The result of this treatment is that lung transplant patients experiencing rejection or bone marrow transplant patients experiencing graft versus host disease (GVHD), who have been resistant to the usual therapies for these conditions, may have a better outcome as a result of this treatment. Another therapy is Stem Cell Leukapheresis, a procedure that selectively harvests hematopoietic stem cells for subsequent Blood-Marrow Transplant.

In providing the community with these therapies, we have made a difference in helping to improve the quality of life for many of our patients. It is a satisfying environment knowing that we are involved with a team that is experienced, cares about patient care, and is so supportive of one another. Our team consists of registered nurses, physicians, and administrative staff. We collaborate with inpatient and Moore's Cancer Center nurses/physicians/nurse practitioners on a frequent basis. Knowing that a team member is always available and willing to help trouble shoot a problem makes what we do less stressful. The team functions as one unit despite the fact that our treatment areas are scattered in three different working areas within the UCSD system. We strive to make our space comfortable to the nurses and to our patients. Quality care is our top priority and is consistently reflected through our high scores on the Press Ganey survey. From patients that the



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unit has been treating for over fifteen years to a patient that is just starting a treatment with us, they are all treated with comfort and care. We strive for excellence and appreciate our patients.

Treating and being exposed to a vast amount of modalities is very interesting. I've been involved with Apheresis for over five years and still have the enthusiasm and eagerness to grow and be involved with the therapies that we do. Seeing the progression of our patients from their health status prior to receiving our treatments to after receiving the treatments is very rewarding. Even with those patients that did not benefit from our procedures; hearing the statement that our team cares and provided comfort during the treatments is satisfying to hear.

Lifelong learning is a priority to our team members. When dealing with cutting edge technology, unanticipated events may occur and are appropriately reported, analyzed and used as learning experiences to continually improve quality of care provided. Team members regularly attend Apheresis related classes to keep up with skills and the latest in current practice. It is truly a pleasant working environment. It is not the disease, but it is truly the **people** that we treat.



Apheresis Team!