

# About Acute Myelogenous Leukemia

## INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS AND FAMILIES

Acute myelogenous leukemia, or AML, is a cancer of the bone marrow, which is where your blood is made. AML is treated by an oncologist who specializes in hematology, which is the study of blood. During your stay at Vanderbilt, your medical team will also include social workers, case managers, registered nurses, and dietitians to make sure all your treatment needs are met. The treatment goal is to put your AML in remission, which means no leukemia cells can be seen in your blood, and to take care of you if they should return, which is called a relapse.

### **Bone marrow**

Bone marrow is formed in your pelvic bones, sternum (chest bone), and the long bones of your legs. Bone marrow produces white cells called leukocytes, red blood cells called erythrocytes, and platelets called thrombocytes. Bone marrow that is affected by leukemia produces too many white cells and not enough red cells and platelets.

### **White blood cells**

When a person has AML, the body produces too many immature white cells. They are released into the bloodstream before they are fully mature, and they are not helpful in fighting infection. Your body needs healthy white cells to fight infection. Often the first symptom of leukemia is an infection that won't seem to go away. Your doctor can see the immature cells in your blood under a microscope.

### **Red blood cells**

Your body cannot make enough red blood cells, which are used to carry oxygen to all parts of your body. Too few red blood cells can make you feel tired and weak and look pale.

### **Platelets**

Your body cannot make a normal number of platelets, which are cells in the blood that help form blood clots to control bleeding. You may bruise easily and have bleeding gums, nosebleeds, and reddish purple spots called petachiae (peeTEE-kee-ah).

You may receive transfusions of red cells or platelets to increase the amount in your blood stream to help control these symptoms.

### **Kinds of AML**

There are seven kinds of AML. Treatment for all of them is basically the same, but each kind of AML responds to treatment in a different way. Your doctor can talk with you about the kind you have and what you can expect from the treatment.