

Health Heroes Around The World

Awareness Month Celebrates Five Million Signing Up To Save Lives

(NAPSA)—More and more, seriously ill patients are getting a second chance at life. It's due to more than five million generous people and a network of donor centers, transplant centers, collection centers and cord blood banks.

This November, the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP) will celebrate patients who received a second chance at life through marrow or blood stem cell transplants and the everyday heroes who have selflessly made second chances possible through National Marrow Awareness Month.

One such hero is marrow donor Steve Fortier, a firefighter and paramedic from Tampa, Fla., Fire Department Station 16. "Heroes come in many forms," Fortier said. "For patients who have a life-threatening disease which can be treated by a marrow or blood stem cell transplant, their heroes are everyday people."

The NMDP and its network of donor centers have recruited more than five million donors, including 500,000 minority donors, facilitating more than 16,000 transplants.

"Recruiting a pool of donors this large has required dedication, innovation and hard work," says Dr. Jeffrey W. Chell, NMDP chief executive officer. "Early in the history of the NMDP, many were skeptical of the altruism of Americans.

"They felt the NMDP would be fortunate to find 250,000 people to join the Registry. But they underestimated our sense of volunteerism and numbers alone can't tell the story. Each transplant represents an amazing personal journey involving one patient, one donor and the people who love them."

Each year, an estimated 30,000 patients are diagnosed with life-



An everyday hero: Firefighter Steve Fortier is a bone marrow donor.

threatening diseases such as leukemia and certain immune system and genetic disorders for which a marrow or blood stem cell transplant can be the best hope for a cure. The NMDP facilitates marrow and blood stem cell transplants for people with life-threatening diseases. It also funds research that studies ways to improve outcomes and find more uses for marrow and blood stem cells.

To help match patients and unrelated donors, the NMDP maintains its computerized Registry that records the tissue type of individuals who have agreed to become donors. The computer crosschecks its records to determine if there is a match for the patient. The reward is a second chance at life.

The cells used in blood stem cell transplants come from three main sources: bone marrow, peripheral (or circulating) blood and the umbilical cord of newborn babies. An adult donates bone marrow and peripheral blood stem cells. Umbilical cord blood stem cells are collected and stored for future use after a baby is born. Marrow, found in bones, resembles blood and contains stem cells that produce red blood cells, white blood cells, platelets and other blood components.

Each person has a unique, inherited tissue type; so physicians check first to see if there is a match in the patient's immediate family. Chances of two siblings matching each other are one in four.

If a related donor cannot be found, the search for an unrelated donor begins. Anyone of any race, ethnicity or sex who is 18 to 60 years old and in good health can become a potential marrow or blood stem cell donor. The collection of bone marrow or blood stem cells generally is done on an outpatient basis.

The donation is anonymous, but if the patient and the donor wish to meet, the NMDP will help them do so at least a year after the procedure, where legally permissible. In some countries, the waiting period is longer and in others, the donor and patient never meet.

During National Marrow Awareness Month in November, the NMDP celebrates those everyday heroes, the heroism of transplant physicians and the spirit of patients who received lifesaving therapy through a marrow or blood stem cell transplant. Any month, however, is a good time to look into marrow donation. In addition, you can help by volunteering your time or donating money to the program.

The NMDP also assists patients toward successful recovery with education on the transplant process and helps them understand health insurance coverage, facts about financial resources and provides advice on developing a financial plan to meet transplant costs.

Learn more about how to become an everyday hero at www.marrow.org, or by calling 1-800-MARROW-2.