

Five minutes could change – and save – someone's life

By Steve Graves 02 April 2008

CAN five minutes sat in a chair really change someone's life forever?

What if there was something you could do in that time that cost you nothing, but had the chance to save a person's life?

Having had a successful bone marrow transplant last year, leukaemia patient Ben Walters, from Glyn Ceiriog, near Chirk, recently organised a Bone Marrow Register clinic through the Anthony Nolan Trust, which saw around 50 people join the register, which searches to find matches for those needing a transplant.

Having heard how easy it was, I went along to the clinic held at Bellan House School, Oswestry and, arriving early, was amazed to find a dozen others had beaten me to it and were already finished.

I spent a couple of minutes reading a leaflet and filling in the form, another minute to realise I had ticked a wrong box (I don't remember being pregnant in the last six months) and then it was into a room where a nurse took a tiny blood sample... there was even tea and a biscuit!

So what happens now? Well, my blood sample is sent away for testing and a record of my bone marrow stored on the Bone Marrow Register.

On average, just one person in every thousand turns out to be a match, so the chances are I will never be called upon, but for those that are, all that is needed is a minor medical procedure requiring a few days off work.

The register is open to potential donors from 18 to 40 years of age, but as Ben explained even people at the end of that range should not be put off: "The one and only match for me was a 39-year-old, which shows how important it is to join the register".

Once you have joined the register your details remain on it until you are 60.

While donating is a relatively easy process for the donor, it's a rough ride for the person waiting for it.

After intensive chemotherapy to kill off their existing bone marrow the new cells are introduced.



Bone marrow transplant patient Ben Walters.

Ben says he remembers seeing the tiny pack of blood arrive for his transplant and was shocked such a small amount could have such a life-changing effect.

Once his bone marrow was killed off, Ben had to remain in a completely sterile environment, as without his body's normal defence even the smallest infection could have been disastrous.

He said: "You have basically wiped the slate clean, so since then I have had to have all the children's immunisations again and have gone through all the childhood illnesses like chickenpox."

Donors remain anonymous for two years, then – if they wish – have the chance to meet: "I really hope I do get to meet him, to say thank you and find out what made them join the register," said Ben,

"Having had the transplant, I can't join the register myself, so I want to do what I can to raise awareness, persuade others to join and increase the chance of finding a match."

Just think, those five minutes in a chair will either be a few moments out of your day, or could be the most valuable thing you ever do in your life.

To find out more or to join the register visit www.anthonynolan.org.uk or phone 02072 841234.

The full article contains 563 words and appears in Evening Leader Wrexham newspaper.
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