

Marrow drive could be life saver

By PAUL LANDAU Telegraph Staff Monday, January 28, 2008

Friends and family of Nicole Nelson are holding a marrow registration drive Wednesday in an effort to help save her life.

Nelson, a 35-year-old resident of Concord, was diagnosed this fall with a rare blood disorder and severe aplastic anemia, and she needs a bone marrow transplant to save her life.

After she was diagnosed, doctors conducted tests on members of her family in hopes of finding a suitable bone marrow donor. Unfortunately, no one in her family proved to be a match.

Doctors then turned to the National Marrow Donor Program Registry, a database of some 11 million registered donors. Patients can usually expect preliminary searches of the database to provide around 100 potential matches; Nelson's search turned up five.

Of the five, none has proved a successful match for Nelson, which has spawned their effort to bring attention to the need for donors.

"Our main goal is to raise awareness of the problem," said Nicole's husband, Sgt. Richard Nelson of the Peterborough Police Department. "Nicole and I had always been blood donors because the need is so great. Then she was diagnosed, and we found out about the need for people in the marrow registry."

"We just feel so helpless, and we're doing everything we can think of. We've had dozens of drives all around New England in the past few months. We've had e-mails from people from Washington, D.C., all the way out to California saying they heard our story and are trying to set up a drive."

Matches can depend greatly on a patient's ethnic background, and Nelson is of Native American descent, a fact she shares with just 1 percent of registered donors.

"There is such a need, especially for people with diverse ethnic backgrounds," said Richard Nelson. "Minorities are so under-represented in the database, it's really unfortunate."

It is estimated that, at any given time, more than 6,000 people are waiting for a match that could save their lives.

"It's really easy to do. I know a lot of people have concerns or are apprehensive about donating, but it's a simple procedure. All it takes is about 10 minutes of paperwork and then they swab your cheek for the testing," explained Stacey Abaid, a physician's assistant

at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Nashua.

"One of my co-workers here was a match for someone, and she said it was the most rewarding experience of her life. That's the thing that people don't realize, by taking just 15 or 20 minutes out of your day you could end up saving a life."

To register, all that is required is that you are in good health and between the ages of 18 and 60. The drive will be held in the conference room of the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Nashua, at 21 E. Hollis St.

If you would like to donate but can't make it during the drive's scheduled time and would like to find another drive happening in your area, or want to learn more information about how you can help, you can visit www.marrow.org.

Paul Landau can be reached at 594-6481 or plandau@nashuatelegraph.com.