

Race organizers step up for bone marrow registry

By: Kathryn Bursch

St. Petersburg, Florida – A group of runners makes their way through the grass of a St. Petersburg park. They're preparing for this weekend's Bay to Bay race. And step by step on Sunday they'll be thinking about Emily Lester.

"Well, I think it could just as easily be my daughter and people forget it can happen to anybody," says runner Gail Linton.



18-year-old Emily Lester has been battling leukemia for six years. The Seminole High School senior recently suffered a relapse and is now in a Memphis hospital, undergoing intense chemotherapy.

"Emily's had a bad few days," says her aunt Maryann Renfrow. "She's experiencing a lot of complications that are to be expected with the level and types of chemo drugs they have to use."

Tampa Bay's 10 News first interviewed Emily and her family in 2006. Back then, we learned how her experience inspired Emily to raise money for cancer causes.

"So you should try to help these people, because you never know when it could be someone you love," Emily told us in 2006.

And now Emily herself needs help. A bone marrow transplant from her sister is no longer working, so now Emily must try and find a match through the National Bone Marrow Registry.

As part of the Bay to Bay race, the St. Petersburg YMCA is hosting a Health and Fitness Expo. On Friday and Saturday, Florida Blood Services will be at the Jim & Heather Gills YMCA to enter people on the registry. Signing up is easy and only involves a swab of your mouth.

Kathryn Bursch, Tampa Bay's 10 News