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Desperate search for bone marrow donor goes on

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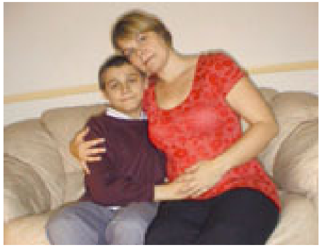
Jamie Zammit is only nine, but he has a rare blood disorder that can only be treated with steroids – meaning he has already hit puberty.



Jamie and Donna Zammit

The schoolboy, who lives in Bromley, is in desperate need of a perfect bone marrow donor to heal the genetic disease, Fanconi anaemia.

Mother Donna and father Thomas, were so desperate for him to have a transplant that they had a fifth child last month, in the hope he or she could be a bone marrow donor.

But they have just found out the baby is not a match for Jamie.

Mrs Zammit said: “We are all devastated – it was only a one in four chance, but everyone was quite confident – even the doctors at Great Ormond Street.

“Obviously we are not disappointed with Donatella, but it’s just a shame that we tried and did not get the results for Jamie.”

The couple took a huge gamble conceiving baby Donatella naturally, because there was a one in four chance she could have had the same illness as Jamie.

She was born on February 13, but a genetic test showed Donatella did not have the illness that causes bone marrow failure, as well as leukaemia and skeletal problems.

It is named after the Swiss paediatrician, Guido Fanconi, who first described it, and is so rare it affects only one in every six and a half million people. There are currently only 10 cases of the condition in the UK.

“Jamie’s not doing too badly,” Mrs Zammit said. “But he has been in and out of hospital having blood transfusions and has been having a really difficult time.

“He’s hanging in there and is an extremely brave person who carries on and fights – I hope he continues this way.”

The Zammit family, which also includes Tommy, 11, Roberto, five, and Lorenzo, four, have Maltese heritage.

It was when they moved back to the Mediterranean archipelago in 2004 that Jamie began to show signs of the illness and the family had to return to England so he could receive treatment.

Jamie has a rare tissue type and despite numerous appeals for donors, including through KOS Media articles, the perfect match has not been found.

Mrs Zammit told her story to The Times in Malta, calling on its readers to ask any of their relatives in England to register their bone marrow with the Anthony Nolan Trust.

The trust is a charity that keeps a register of potential bone marrow donors for people with illnesses such a leukaemia and rare blood diseases like Fanconi's, in the UK.

It also contacts registers held in countries such as America, Israel and Germany, but the health service in Malta does not have a register.

Mrs Zammit said: "Jamie is very sweet with Donatella and a very proud big brother. For everything this family has been through, she has brought a lot of happiness and joy. She has been a very positive distraction.

"I am appealing to people to contact the Anthony Nolan Trust, particularly those from mixed-race backgrounds, to see if they are a match for Jamie."

It is impossible to know how long Jamie can continue being treated with steroids and blood transfusions before his bone marrow fails, she added.

To register with the trust go to www.anthonynolan.org.uk or call 0207 284 1234.