

# Local teen receives lifesaving donation

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**By Laura Kaae**  
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SAN ANTONIO

Since December, the Mancuso family has been playing a four-month numerical game no parent wants to play.

Sixteen is the number of weeks 14-year old Patrick Mancuso has been dealing with acute myeloid leukemia.

The number of chemotherapy treatments he's undergone since his diagnosis? Four.

But one is the number the family is most fond of these days. One bone marrow match from an anonymous donor who was found about a month ago. One person with the stem cells that match Patrick's and could save his life.

For months, Patrick and his mother, Simone, and father, Michael, have been going back and forth from their Nolanville home to Patrick's hospital rooms, first at Wilford Hall Medical Center on Lackland Air Force Base, and now at Methodist Children's Hospital of South Texas Medical Center in San Antonio, where Patrick has been working with the pediatric bone marrow transplant team.

"We were at Lackland for three months," Simone said earlier this week. "We got here (Methodist Children's Hospital) on Friday."

Initial rounds of chemotherapy did not help Patrick's leukemia, and his doctors soon realized a bone marrow transplant was needed.

In a bone marrow transplant, the host's bone marrow is killed off by chemotherapy and radiation and gets replaced by new bone marrow, given during a transfusion.

The healthy marrow comes from a donor, often a sibling, and will help create new blood cells in its recipient. Ideally, all the new cells will be cancer free.

However, in Patrick's situation, his younger brother was not a match, and the family had to turn to the National Bone Marrow Registry for assistance.

Once the family learned of Patrick's need for bone marrow, they asked for help from the local community, and the Killeen community stepped up in droves.

The Scott & White Bone Marrow Donation Program in Temple was inundated with calls from people wanting to help out after news broke about the Patrick's search for a donor in late January.

"There has been a tremendous response from the Killeen community," Debbie Mabry,



Fourteen-year-old Patrick Mancuso, of Nolanville, keeps in touch via text messaging as he awaits his bone marrow transplant at Methodist Children's Hospital in San Antonio.

manager of the Scott & White Bone Marrow Donation Program, told the Killeen Daily Herald in early February as the first of several marrow drives were kicking off in the area.

The Killeen Daily Herald received calls from people all over the nation, from New Jersey to Hawaii, of concerned people wanting to know if they were a match for the Eastern Hills Middle School eighth-grader.

Michael, a first sergeant in the 1st Infantry Division, and Simone, who works for Freedom Suzuki-Subaru in Temple, have been saying since the beginning of their son's illness that a donation into the bone marrow registry is not only helping Patrick, it's helping the thousands of other lives affected by cancer each year.

As the bone marrow drives were going on in the area, the Mancusos were in San Antonio, sometimes at the Fisher House on Lackland Air Force Base and sometimes in an RV parked about 20 minutes from Methodist Children's Hospital.

In late February, a match was found for Patrick.

Though the donor has to remain anonymous, Simone said the family is grateful the donor, who they know is female, went to all her appointments in a timely manner, to get Patrick the stem cells he needs as soon as possible.

"It's awful not knowing if they want to do it," Simone said of the donor. "We're thankful for her time. We were asking for a lot and she may have saved somebody's life with it."

Last week Patrick began undergoing radiation therapy to kill off all of his current bone marrow, explained Traci Donaho, transplant coordinator for Methodist Children's Hospital.

"First he had cranial radiation then total body radiation," she said. "We want to clean his body to make room for the new cells."

The stem cells arrive at the hospital anonymously, too, to protect the confidentiality of the donor, Donaho said.

As of Easter Sunday, the family was eagerly awaiting arrival of the stem cells, so Patrick could begin his new, leukemia-free life.

In the months he's been at Wilford Hall and Children's Methodist, he's been able to catch up with his friends, some through the cards and banners that line his new hospital room, and others through text messaging.

When friends realized they could keep up with Patrick while he was laid up in the hospital, the text messages started pouring in.

Six hundred the first month, Patrick recalls with a laugh. That's chump change now. The last time his mom got a bill, Patrick had 5,567 texts added up in her bill summary.

Patrick laughs at the number as he munches on Easter candy, and added that his mother needed to switch to an unlimited texting plan.

"He's hooked," she says, looking over at her son, whose eyes are fixated on his phone.

The room he's in has a controlled filtering system, to help keep the germs away from Patrick, whose body is at great risk for infection. People must wash and sanitize their hands before they enter his room, and not more than four people can be in his room at any given time. Anyone with so much as a cough or tickle in their throat is kept off the floor of the hospital.

"It's like a super sweet jail," Patrick joked. "I get video games and everything, but I can't leave."

Over the past months, Patrick has put on some of the weight he lost, and Simone said doctors wanted to take advantage of the state he's in to do the transplant.

Patrick said on Sunday that he couldn't wait for the transplant to be over, not only because he'll be getting a new lease on life, but also because his blood type will change, too.

"It's awesome," he said, recalling that he'd seen a television crime show where someone's blood type changed due to a marrow transplant, and now it's happening to him.

"He'll have the donor's blood type," Donaho explained. "He'll always be Patrick, but he'll have two types of DNA."

On Monday, the hospital received word that the stem cells were arriving early, so Patrick's first transplant took place early Tuesday morning. The second part of his transplant took place a few hours later.

"He gets an IV in his central line," Donaho said of the transplant. "It looks like a blood transfusion."

As of Tuesday afternoon, Simone said everything was going well with Patrick and that he was doing as good as could be expected. "So far he's doing great," she said. "We'll see what the cells are doing in the next couple of weeks."

Donaho said the real test comes in the next two to three weeks, to see how Patrick is faring with the new cells.

Ideally, the donor cells will have completely taken over.

"We will check him in 30 days to see how much is the donor versus how much is the host," Donaho said. "We want 100 percent donor cells," she said.

As for Patrick, his goal has always been five.

Five months total he wants to give to his cancer, before he goes back to being a normal kid, playing football, track and baseball and walking dogs to pay for more video games.

"I want to be done by the fifth month," he said. "Then I'm out."