

Marrow-match search spans nations

Mother hoping to save her son dreams of new \$1M testing lab in Nicaragua

August 03, 2007
JILLIAN KASTER
RECORD STAFF
KITCHENER

After Dany Mercado couldn't find a match for a bone-marrow transplant in Canada, he and his family pinned their hopes on relatives in Nicaragua.

Now his mother, Ileana Mercado, is embarking on another ambitious campaign.

She has proposed that the Rubendario Medical University in Nicaragua open a lab for bone-marrow compatibility testing.

Currently, her native country doesn't have the testing facilities. And Ileana doesn't want another mother to experience what she's been coping with to save her son.

The university has accepted her proposal, but now the Kitchener mother needs to raise the

money. The project could cost \$1 million.

"The project is huge," Mercado said. "It's kind of a dream. But I don't want to see another mother go through this."

She's desperate. Dany Mercado, 24, was diagnosed with leukemia five years ago. Doctors at Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto told him he needs a bone-marrow transplant. Without one, his chance of surviving is almost zero.

Dany has been on the waiting list for more than a year. So far, 110 tests have been completed, including tests on 50 family members.

"We have to be careful when doing the tests because money is a huge thing," Mercado said.



Dany Mercado, 23, (centre) has leukemia and needs a bone-marrow transplant. His mother is raising money to help open a bone-marrow testing lab in the family's native Nicaragua. Pictured with Dany are (left to right) his mother Ileana, brother Elias and sister Stephany.

Each test costs about \$200 US.

The Mercados searched for a match in Nicaragua after the Canadian Blood Services couldn't find a donor in Canada. The family has had to pay for blood samples to be transported to Costa Rica for testing.

There is a better chance of finding a match within the same ethnic group, said Anne Trueman of Canadian Blood Services. The Canadian bone-marrow registry is overwhelmingly Caucasian, she said.

If a match can't be found here, international registries will be searched. This gives Canadians access to 11 million potential donors worldwide. But even on the worldwide registry ethnic groups are not well represented.

"They don't have much opportunity to find a match," Mercado said.

Ultimately, she would like Nicaragua to be able to join a worldwide bone-marrow registry because it would give Hispanic people all over the world a greater chance of finding matches.

A bank account has been opened at TD Canada Trust, Branch 67, account number 676294972.

For information on becoming a bone-marrow donor, visit <http://www.bloodservices.ca>.

jkaster@therecord.com