



## Help save young boy's life

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Lethonololo "Tlhogi" Maseko is just like many other 15-year old boys at St Alban's College in Pretoria, except that he has leukaemia and is in dire need of a bone marrow stem cell transplant.

Yet in order for Tlhogi to get the transplant, he needs to find a healthy and perfectly matching donor.

As there is a current shortage of black donors on the South African Bone Marrow Registry (SABMR), his chances are slim, unless new black donors come forward in large numbers as a potential match.

The only possible matches are always in the same ethnic group. Ethnic origin is very important when matching donors and patients. The 'markers' that are tested when searching for a match are genetically inherited, and often unique to a particular race.

His eight-year-old sister, Tshegofatso, was tested last year but was unfortunately not a suitable match.

### **Diagnosis is grim**

Tlhogi was first diagnosed at the end of the first term last year when he became unusually tired during a school outing to a museum and was barely able to stand.

It was then that the medical staff at school spotted an abscess under his right arm.

He was anaemic and pale and after a month's course of iron tablets, he underwent blood tests on the Thursday before Easter. The following day his parents were told he had to undergo a bone marrow biopsy.

His first bout of treatment involved an autologous stem cell transplant, which means he was treated with his own stem cells. This put him into remission for six months.

### **The leukaemia returns**

All was going well, he was about to complete the second term of 2007 when, just before his exams, the Maseko family were given the heartbreaking news that the leukaemia had returned.

"I knew nothing of leukaemia when I was diagnosed. Now, I could write a book," said Tlhogi.

Tlhogi is presently on a drip, lying in a bed at the Faerie Glen Hospital where he is watching KFC advertisements on television.

When asked what the first thing is he will do when he gets out of hospital, he replies with a broad grin: "Eat food, preferably my mom's food, cooked with love."

The process is taking its toll on the rest of the family and his father, Baker MJ Maseko, a businessman in advertising, knows the value of publicity and wants to tell Tlhogi's story to save not only his life, but perhaps others too.

### **If you can't be a donor, be a supporter**

As bone marrow donors have to be between 18 and 50 years old, many of them cannot become donors. But you can be sure they will be donning bandanas in support of The Sunflower Fund Bandana Day on 21 September.

Funds raised through National Bandana Day assist The Sunflower Fund in paying for the necessary blood tests to put new donors on the registry to help patients like Tlhogi and the many others suffering from leukaemia and other life-threatening blood disorders.

You too can help, by buying a bandana and becoming a donor.

In the words of Tlhogi: "A small thing can go a long way. Just by giving blood you can save a life".

So spare a little. Just two tubes of blood are needed to join the South African Bone Marrow Registry to see if you could be a potential match for Tlhogi or someone else.

### **Crucial potential donor information**

Here are a few things you might like to know about saving a life by becoming a bone marrow or stem cell donor:

- Only two tubes of blood are needed to register you as a donor
- Your unique details are then placed on the SA Bone Marrow Registry
- Should you be a match for somebody in the future, you will be contacted to donate stem cells
- The chance of finding a compatible donor is 1:100 000
- There is a great shortage of male donors as well as black donors on the registry
- You need to be between 18 and 50 years of age and in excellent health
- You must have no history of hepatitis or sexually transmitted diseases
- You must weigh a minimum of 50 kg
- You must be permanently residing in the South Africa (and likely to be for at least the next two to three).

### **How can I join?**

All donors must call the National Call Centre toll free at 0800 12 10 82 at The Sunflower Fund, weekdays between 9am and 4pm.

You can help the Sunflower Fund by making donations towards the testing. Testing costs The Sunflower Fund just over R1 000 per new donor if both first level HLA-AB typing and second level HLA-DR typing are done.

### **Why DR-typing and why the cost?**

Most bone marrow registries around the world have their donor samples tissue typed to a DR level. The SABMR currently only has 6% of donors' tissue typed to this level and this needs to be improved to be in line with international standards.

If donors are HLA-AB and HLA-DR typed, it is much easier and quicker to find good matches for patients.