

## Firefighter's long-distance bid to save life of stranger

By [Chris Fay](#)

A FIREFIGHTER from County Durham has saved the life of a complete stranger who lives tens of thousands of miles away.

Phil Towns, 47, thought nothing more of it when he first signed up for the British bone marrow register about eight years ago.

However, the married father-of-three, from Pity Me, near Durham, recently found he is a near-perfect genetic match for a leukaemia sufferer in Turkey.

"I have been a blood donor for over ten years and one time when I was giving blood they asked me to sign the bone marrow register, which I did," said Mr Towns.

"About a month ago, I received a letter telling me about a patient suffering from leukaemia and asking if I would still be willing to donate my bone marrow.

"There was no question. I'm in the fire service, which is about saving lives, so I said of course I would."

Mr Towns has worked for the fire service for 22 years and is currently stationed in Newton Aycliffe.

Because of his age, he had to undergo rigorous testing before he was allowed to donate.

Once cleared, he travelled to Newcastle's Royal Victoria Infirmary, where he underwent a bone marrow harvest under general anaesthetic.

Lynn McQueen, bone marrow co-ordinator with the National Blood Service, said: "People like Phil do this out of the kindness of their own hearts so it is up to them which method they use to donate.

"In Phil's case, with the bone marrow harvest, we might recommend they take a week off work, depending on the type of work they do, but with peripheral blood stem cell donation, donors can pretty much go straight back to work."

The register operates by finding the best possible match for a recipient by searching for donors worldwide.

Mr Towns said: "Because it was time critical, I opted for the marrow harvest, so I'm a little bit sore, but my stem cells have now gone to Turkey, which is great.

"It's the best Christmas present I could give anyone."



MARROW DONOR: Firefighter Phil Towns, who has donated bone marrow to a leukaemia patient in Turkey