

# A call for donors of bone marrow

## Recruiting effort centers on expanding registry of people from South Asian background

By [CATHLEEN F. CROWLEY](#), Staff writer

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For patients waiting for a bone marrow transplant, race matters.

There's a stronger chance that people will find a match in someone of the same racial background. That's why two Albany Medical College students became concerned when they saw that donors from their own background were poorly represented on the donor list.

"We were looking at the statistics and it wasn't something that we were proud of," said Tina Mehta, a student at Albany Medical College who is organizing a bone marrow registration drive with fellow student Tuhin Chaudhury.

Mehta, of Niskayuna, was born in New York, and Chaudhury was born in California, but their parents are from India.

The goal of the registration drive is to recruit people who would be willing to donate their bone marrow or blood cells to others with South Asian roots, including India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, East Africa, Guyana, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and West Indies. However, anyone is welcome to register.

Currently, the match rate for a South Asian patient in need of a bone marrow transplant is 1 in 20,000, one of the lowest rates on the National Marrow Donors Program. Mehta said they'd like to raise it to 1 in 10,000.

Of the 6.5 million volunteer donors on the national list, 70 percent are Caucasian, said Moazzam Kahn, one of the founders of the South Asian Marrow Association of Recruiters, which works with National Marrow Donor Program to find volunteers. SAMAR is sponsoring the drive being organized by the Albany medical students.

About 100,000 people with South Asian backgrounds are on the donor list, which represents 1.5 percent of registered donors.

"We are the most underrepresented," Khan said. "I don't think there is much of a cultural barrier. It's just a lack of awareness and lack of education."

To get on the list, volunteers must be healthy and between the ages of 18 and 60. The two-minute registration process includes a cheek swab, which is used to find tissue type.

If a match is found, the volunteer can choose not to donate.

Only 30 percent of patients in need of a marrow or blood cell transplant find a matched donor in their family. The other 70 percent often turn to the national donor registry to search for an unrelated donor or cells drawn from the umbilical cord of a newborn baby.

During a bone marrow donation, marrow is removed with a surgical needle from the back of the pelvic bone. Marrow donors are given either general or regional anesthesia and about four to eight tiny incisions are made. The incisions are so small that stitches are not necessary. The procedure lasts between 45 and 90 minutes.

Marrow, which constantly regenerates itself, is replaced within several weeks, according to the National Marrow Donor Program.

The registration drive will be held on Saturday, July 21, at the Albany Hindu Temple, 450 Albany Shaker Road from 5 to 9:30 p.m.

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