

Looking for rare bone marrow

By [Sharon Salyer](#), Herald Writer

MONDAY, JULY 30, 2007 1:57 am

BOTHELL - In her job as a clinical research associate at Seattle's Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, hardly a day goes by that Ponni Kumar doesn't see the need for bone marrow donors.

"We come across patients who don't find the right match," she said. The procedure is used to help people battling diseases such as leukemia.

The search for a match is even more difficult for people who are ethnic minorities, she said.

For Indians and others of South Asia ancestry, the chances of finding an unrelated compatible bone marrow donor can be as small as one 1 in 20,000.

So the stories of two men of India heritage, Vinay Chakravarthy, 28, and Sameer Bhatia, 31, battling acute myelogenous leukemia launched a national effort to get people registered as bone marrow donors.

The latest of these events was held Sunday at the Bothell Hindu Temple and Cultural Center, where Kumar was one of 60 people who signed up for the national bone marrow registry. It was one of four such registration drives being held in the Puget Sound region.

Bhatia grew up on Mercer Island and was working in Silicon Valley until he was diagnosed in May with leukemia.

He is being treated at the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance, where he has just finished his second round of chemotherapy and is waiting for a bone marrow transplant, said his cousin Anish Talati.

"It's always difficult to find a match for a person of Indian origin," Talati said. "What we're trying to do is increase awareness among South Asians and get them registered."

Chakravarthy, who grew up in Fremont, Calif., is being treated at the Dana-Farber/Harvard Cancer Center in Boston, said his friend Jeff Young, a Seattle attorney. He and Chakravarthy met when they were students at the University of California at Berkeley.

Chakravarthy graduated from the Boston University's medical school and was married in the summer of 2005, Young said.

Chakravarthy was diagnosed with leukemia in November and has undergone several rounds of chemotherapy. When he had a relapse, the national bone marrow registration drive was launched, Young said. It has a goal of registering 50,000 people.

Chakravarthy checked back into the hospital earlier this month and will undergo experimental chemotherapy. One possible match has been found, Young said, if his leukemia is found to be in remission.

On Sunday, Manav Bhatia, 28, from Seattle, was the latest to join the registration drive, which has now enlisted more than 20,000 people.

All he had to do to register was swab his cheek four times with cotton swabs and fill out some paperwork.

Manav Bhatia said he heard about the drive from his former advisor at the University of Washington. He recently graduated from the UW with a Ph.D. in aerospace engineering. He said he has e-mailed friends throughout the United States to alert them to the need.

"The important thing to stress is they may not only may be saving a life today but may be saving a life in the future," said Gita Gisin, who helped organize Sunday's registration drive. Once registered, people remain on the potential donation rolls until they're 61, she said.

"This is one area where your race is so important," Gisin said. "The chances of finding a match from your own race are the greatest."

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How to help

For updates on the two men battling leukemia for whom the national bone marrow registration drives have been organized, check their Web sites at: www.helpvinay.org or www.helpsameer.org.

If you would like more information on the national drive to get more people of South Asian heritage registered for bone marrow donations, call Gita Gisin at 206-618-6088.