

Woman finds bone marrow match for cancer treatment

Donor an unidentified 19-year-old man

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By [AARON AUPPERLEE, staff writer](#)

BARSTOW — All she knows is he is a 19-year-old man, and his bone marrow matches.

Dena Hibbetts Gerardi, who was born in Barstow but lives in Silver Lakes with her husband, Mark, the parks maintenance supervisor for Barstow, does not know where the man lives, but at the end of October she will receive his bone marrow in an attempt to cure her of an aggressive form of Hodgkin's lymphoma she has been fighting for two years.

After a relatively short in a national registry, she found her match.

"I didn't expect it to happen that fast," she said. "Now I feel like the clock is ticking."

Other patients at City of Hope National Medical Center, a cancer treatment and research facility in Durate, have waited for years to find a donor. Hibbetts Gerardi began waiting this year and learned last week she had a match. Suddenly, Hibbetts Gerardi said, she had to prepare and pack for the three month hospitalization to receive the treatment.



"I'm cramming as much into each day as I can," she said, "cause I don't want to miss a second."

In July Hibbetts Gerardi teamed up with the Blood Bank of San Bernardino in July to host a bone marrow screening drive in Barstow to look for a match locally. The drive, slated to run

until 7 p.m. but stretching late into the night, collected 119 units of blood and did 154 bone marrow screenings.

Dr. Amrita Krishnan, who works at City of Hope, said the procedure is intensive. She said patients are given a high dose of chemotherapy and radiation that knocks out the cancer and also destroys the patient's bone marrow. Then the donor's marrow is injected into the patient. Krishnan said then they wait and see if the new bone marrow cells graft into the body.

The donor's bone marrow, which makes white blood cells, gives the patient a new immune system, Krishnan said. The hope is, the new immune system will fight the cancerous cells and reduce the risk of recurrence. The procedure has become more successful over time, but Krishnan said each case is different depending on the patient's medical history and disease. Hibbetts Gerardi had a stem cell transplant in August 2006 that did not work.

Hibbetts Gerardi said the procedure is similar to a blood transfusion. She said doctors told her the chemotherapy and radiation will take her to the "brink of death."

"So they can rescue you with the transplant," she said. But she does not think of the procedure that way.

"There's lots of that can go wrong, but it's really an anti-climatic procedure. The drama is happening in your body," she said.

And her hopes are high.

"I just feel like I wasn't brought this perfect match for it to fail," she said.

Hibbetts Gerardi said that, in a year, if both she and the donor are well enough and agree, she will get to meet her donor.