



Student card



Teenaged bone marrow donor saves a life

Hamzah Khaled, 20, has been a regular blood donor ever since he saw a presentation about it at school. It was at his fourth donor session, held at his school, that he decided to join the bone marrow registry.

“Staff at the session told me how more people from diverse ethnic backgrounds are needed to increase the chance of matching patients with a donor.”

Within a month, Hamzah – who by now was on a gap year placement – was asked to become one of the country’s youngest bone marrow donors.

“I was surprised to be contacted, especially so soon. I decided to do it because I knew it would only be a few days out of my life to save someone else.”

Proud of the life-saving difference he made, Hamzah says, “I would do it again, and I’d encourage more people from ethnic communities to register.”



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Fact file

1

Bone marrow is the soft, jelly-like tissue found in the hollow centre of certain bones. It is the home of stem cells, which are the building blocks of blood. These building blocks create the red cells, which carry oxygen; the white cells, which fight infection; and the platelets, which stop bleeding. All these cells are produced by the stem cells and released into the blood stream via the veins and thin tissue surrounding the bone.

2

Without bone marrow, blood cannot be produced, so when things go wrong and the bone marrow becomes damaged, the patient must receive a stem cell transplant to survive.

3

If you need a bone marrow transplant and there's no match within your family, it is easier to find a match if you have a common tissue type. Generally the more ethnically diverse you are the harder it is to find a match.

Live debates

Choose one or more of the following statements to debate as a group. Write the arguments for and against the statements and decide which side you are on. Do all the members of your group agree?

- "Because it's often really difficult to find bone marrow that matches the patient, I think everyone over the age of 18 should be made to register as a donor."
- "I like the idea of helping people to live a better life, but giving bone marrow takes up too much time and requires a painful operation."
- "I'm okay about blood donation, but I wouldn't want to give bone marrow."

Getting into their shoes

- Hamzah Khaled is keen to encourage more people from ethnic communities to register as bone marrow donors. If he was given a three-minute slot on community radio, what might he say to young people about donating bone marrow?
- Stay on radio and have a live 'phone-in', giving callers the chance to express their views on why they would – or would not – consider registering as blood or bone marrow donors.
- A 19-year-old has decided to register to become a bone marrow donor. His parents don't like the idea at all. How might the conversation go?