

Bone Marrow Appeal – Common Questions and Answers

Q Why do we need to search for a bone marrow donor in Gibraltar?

A 15-month old Julian Baldachino has a rare type of leukaemia which has not responded to standard chemotherapy. A bone marrow transplant is his last chance of a cure. A worldwide search for a match has proved unsuccessful. Because of Gibraltar's unique genetic makeup the chances of finding a donor, although slim, are higher.

Q Why is this appeal so urgent?

A Julian needs a bone marrow transplant within the next 6 weeks. The testing process will take some time so the window of opportunity is small.

Q What kind of volunteer blood donors are you looking for?

A Men and women aged 18-40 inclusive. They must be in good general health, cannot be pregnant or delivered in the past within the last 12 months.

Q What does bone marrow donation entail?

A Initially a simple blood test to check if it matches Julian's tissue type. If a potential donor is found they will have to undergo further blood tests here in Gibraltar. If they prove to be a full match they will be invited to become Julian's donor.

Q What will the actual bone marrow donation process involve?

A The donor will travel to London at GHA's expense with a companion. There are 2 ways to donate marrow:

- (a) Under general anaesthetic, bone marrow is removed from your hip using a syringe. After donating bone marrow you may experience some discomfort at the site where the needle is inserted into your hip but this should pass within a few days. Usually the donor can go home the next day. 5 days recuperation/rest is then recommended. You may experience transient lower back pain and may feel tired for a few days.
- (b) A peripheral blood stem cell donation is a procedure that allows you to donate stem cells without you having to directly donate bone marrow. Every day for 4-5 days you will be injected with a medicine which will increase the number of stem cells you have in your blood. On the 5th day you will be connected to a special machine that can separate the stem cells from your blood. The stem cells are then collected for donation.

Both methods of bone marrow donation are safe and the risks of developing complications are small. However, possible complications include infection and an adverse reaction to the anaesthetics.

Q What do I do if I'm interested in becoming a donor?

A You may phone the Bone Marrow Appeal Hotline on 20044411 where an operator will allocate a date and time for collecting your blood sample. The lines will be open daily from 0900-1700 from Friday 17th. **You are asked not to turn up at St Bernard's without an appointment. Appointments will only be channelled through the hotline.**

Q What information will I need to provide before having my blood taken?

A You have to give your name, date of birth and contact details. A confidential bone marrow health questionnaire and consent form is required to be completed in private with the assistance of a health professional.

Q Who will be funding the exercise and will I incur any costs?

A Funding has been provided by Government. You will therefore not incur any costs.

Important Note: Donating bone marrow, although relatively risk-free is a very important personal decision. The GHA recommends that you carefully read the information available on what donating bone marrow entails before you donate blood. Only persons willing to undertake the bone marrow donation should come forward to donate blood.