

Health Awareness

Volunteer Marrow Donation Best for Patients and Donors

by Dr. Jeffrey Chell, CEO,
National Marrow Donor Program
(NAPSA)—More than 10 million people stand ready to donate their marrow to someone—anyone—searching for a cure for blood cancer and other devastating illnesses. Newly proposed changes in legislation could make such donations more difficult.



Dr. Jeffrey Chell

These generous donors are members of the Be The Match Registry, the world's largest listing of potential marrow donors and donated umbilical cord blood units. Marrow and cord blood contain stem cells that can restore a patient's immune system and help combat disease.

For 25 years, the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP)—which operates the Be The Match Registry—has connected altruistic donors with patients in need. So far, we have made more than 50,000 marrow and cord blood transplants possible. Every transplant has come from a donor who expected nothing in return except the honor of saving another person's life.

This lifesaving work is at risk. There is currently a challenge to a well-established federal law that bans people from accepting compensation for donating body parts for transplantation, including solid organs and bone marrow.

Those in favor of compensating marrow donors argue that it will encourage more people to donate, thus increasing access to this lifesaving treatment. But paying

donors is not the answer to helping more patients. There is no shortage of volunteers willing to step forward as nearly 20 million people are listed on registries worldwide and hundreds of thousands of potential donors join the registry each year.

The only limit to adding more people to the registry is funding. It costs \$100 to cover the necessary genetic testing required to add each new person. Money paid to an individual donor would be much better spent if it were used to increase the total number of people in the registry, which would in turn help multiple patients in need. More funding would also help more patients—especially the uninsured—afford the transplants they so desperately need.

Paying donors doesn't address the real barriers that prevent patients from receiving transplants and, in fact, could have disastrous consequences. The current law—the National Organ Transplant Act—protects the safety of both patients and donors. Compensation puts patients and donors at undue risk, and will limit treatment options for patients and decrease the quality of donations.

Decades of experience and research show that a volunteer donor system saves more lives than a system in which donors are motivated by money. Paying donors goes against the best interests of the patients and donors we serve. For these and other reasons, the NMDP opposes paying donors and does not intend to change its policies on compensation.