

Our Health

You Could Save Someone From Sickle Cell Disease

(NAPS)—On World Sickle Cell Day, June 19, and all through the year, disparities in healthcare can result in unequal outcomes for people of color—but that can be remedied.

The Problem

Sickle cell disease affects 100,000 people in the U.S., mostly Black and bi-racial. People living with sickle cell disease experience ongoing crises where cells block the blood stream, causing excruciating pain and damage to the organs and tissues, and a shorter lifespan. While new developments in bone marrow and stem cell transplantation now offer the hope of a cure and a healthy life to these patients, most have a hard time accessing treatment.

One reason is that while there are more than 38 million registered donors from 55 countries in the worldwide registries, 75 percent of African-American, Caribbean or bi-racial people cannot find a life-saving match.

The best chance for a life-saving marrow match lies with those of similar ethnic or racial ancestry, yet due to a dire need for diversity in the registries, many people die needlessly.

Some patients have a family member who can donate, but in 70% of cases a volunteer donor is required.

A Solution

That's where the Gift of Life Marrow Registry comes in. It's a non-profit organization that facilitates stem cell and bone marrow transplants. Now, the registry has launched a campaign, "Blood Is Thicker," aimed at improving health outcomes for Black patients. The message is simple: Everyone has the power to save a life—starting with a simple cheek swab.

The non-profit is joined in the effort by such organizations as the NAACP and health experts nationwide to



People of color can sign up to help save the lives of those with sickle cell disease.

encourage more people in the community to join in this fight, while also dispelling misconceptions about the registration and donation processes.

Doctor's Advice

"As a doctor who treats sickle cell patients, I am all too familiar with the fact that history is still affecting the ways we approach medicine and treatment for all," explained Ahmar Urooj Zaidi, M.D., a hematologist and sickle cell physician at Children's Hospital of Michigan. "One in 13 African-Americans is born with the sickle cell trait and, unfortunately, there is no disease more intertwined with racism, prejudice and bias than sickle cell disease. Working with Gift of Life, I hope to help shine a spotlight on the disparities that sickle cell patients face, including low access to possible cures such as a bone marrow or stem cell transplant."

What You Can Do

Volunteer donors 18 to 35 and in good health can support the effort by joining the registry and using their voice to educate others.

Learn More

For more information about the "Blood Is Thicker" campaign, visit giftoflife.org/bloodisthicker.