

From the University of Mississippi Medical Center Division of Public Affairs

MISSISSIPPI MARROW DONOR PROGRAM SEEKS PERFECT MATCH FOR PATIENTS

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The University of Mississippi Medical Center, which has the only bone marrow transplant program in the state, will participate in the national Be The Match campaign to improve the number of African American donors.

Patients usually find a suitable donor in someone with a similar ethnic background, but the national registry reports that just 7 percent of the nation's 10 million registered potential bone marrow donors are African American. Be The Match aims to improve this number through a national awareness campaign this July, which is African American Bone Marrow Awareness Month.

The National Marrow Donor Program has seen a significant increase in the donor registry since Mississippi native Robin Roberts announced she has a blood and bone marrow disease that requires a bone marrow transplant for treatment.

Jeffrey Chell, CEO of the registry Be The Match, told the *Associated Press* that around 15,000 people had registered since Roberts, the "Good Morning America" anchor, announced her diagnosis on June 11. That's about 11,200 more than they would normally receive.

UMMC donor recruiter Tazia Jackson is happy to see people responding to the need for more donors. She travels across Mississippi encouraging potential donors through outreach efforts.

"Our purpose is to inform potential donors that every day, thousands of patients with life-threatening diseases such as leukemia need a marrow or umbilical cord transplant, but they don't have a donor within their family to match them," she said. "They depend on the Be the Match registry to give them a hope for a cure."

In 2008, then high school senior Jessica Howard decided to do a senior class project about blood transfusions and donations. It seemed a natural choice for Howard whose mother Renee Howard has led UMMC's blood donor drives for the last 15 years.

In 2012, Howard answered an unexpected phone call from the Mississippi Marrow Donor Program.

"They called to say I was the perfect match for someone," Howard said. "It surprised me, after four years. I didn't even remember registering for the program, but I was happy to be able to donate."

Donors can join the registry by completing a consent form with contact information, health history and a signature. Those who qualify will give a swab of their cheek cells so that tissue type can be determined. Some donors have matched with a patient quickly, while others have gone as long as 20 years before being contacted by the national registry.

"It's not a guarantee you'll match someone, but by taking the first step you are giving the patients hope," Jackson said. "You can be listed on the registry as young as 18, and you will remain on the registry until you are 60 years of age."

To hold a bone marrow drive or to donate, contact Tazia Jackson at (601) 984-6799, toll free at 1-800-862-3627 or email tvjackson@umc.edu.

Cutline:

Connie Nichols, left, UMMC apheresis nurse, and Jessica Howard, bone marrow donor

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06/27/12

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The University of Mississippi Medical Center, located in Jackson, is the state's only academic medical center. University of Mississippi Health Care represents the clinical programs of the Medical Center and includes University Hospitals and Health System and University Physicians, the faculty group practice. UMMC encompasses five health science schools, including medicine, nursing, health related professions, dentistry and graduate studies, as well as the site where University of Mississippi pharmacy students do their clinical training. The Medical Center's threefold mission is to educate tomorrow's health-care professionals, conduct innovative research to improve human health, and to provide the highest quality care available to the state's citizens. A major goal of the Medical Center is the improvement of the health of Mississippians and the elimination of health disparities. For more information, contact the Division of Public Affairs at 601-984-1100 or visit us on the Web at <http://publicaffairs.umc.edu/>