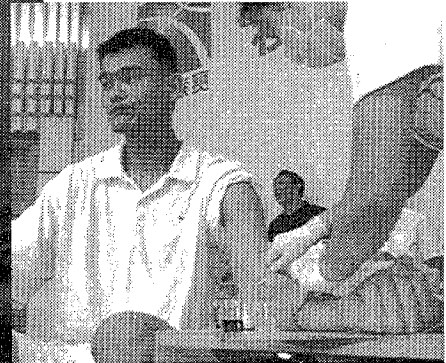


Volunteers offer their DNA from cheek swabs to register as potential bone-marrow donors.

A nurse collects blood sample from NBA star Yao Ming of the Houston Rockets at an activity held in the Renmin University of China in Beijing September 4, 2005. Yao and students from ten Chinese universities took part in the event promoting the donation of hematopoietic stem cell, or bone marrow. [newsphoto]



## Bone Marrow Donation — Will You Be the One?

By Celia Chan

I first became interested in the topic of bone marrow donation when I was doing some research for a class project in graduate school. Many people have heard of blood donation: they've seen the Red Cross blood drives, or they know someone who has donated blood. Perhaps they are blood donors themselves. I was familiar with blood donation, but bone marrow donation was something new to me, and as I've discovered, to many Asian-Americans.

Every year, almost 15,000 people in the United States with leukemia or another life-threatening disease can be best treated through a bone marrow transplant.<sup>1</sup> To have a successful transplant, the patient must find someone whose bone marrow is a match for their own. The best chances of finding a match is usually within the patient's own family, such as a sibling, but about 70% of patients are unable to find a close match and need to rely on unrelated marrow donors. Bone marrow matches are genetic, which means that the patient has a better chance of matching if the donor comes from the same racial or ethnic heritage.

The National Bone Marrow Program (NMDP) runs the Be the Match® bone marrow registry, which is the largest and most ethnically diverse marrow registry in the world. A bone marrow registry matches potential volunteer donors with patients who need a transplant, using a database

or directory of tissue types.<sup>2</sup> Many patients turn to the NMDP to find a potential match.

Nationally, minorities are underrepresented on the registry. Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders make up about 7% of the total number of volunteer donors on the registry. The more people that sign up, the greater the chances that a potential match may be found for a patient.

It's simple to sign up. There are nine bone marrow recruitment centers based in Florida that are listed on the NMDP website. Some of these centers run bone marrow drives and list those drives on their websites. When you attend a drive, you are given a cheek swab kit, which includes special cotton swabs that you use to swab the inside of your cheek. This sample is collected and used to tissue type your cheek cells, and the results are then used to match a patient. You can also order a kit online at the NMDP website.

Once you join the registry, you may never be called to donate. Donors can join the registry when they are 18, and they are asked to stay on the registry until they turn 61, although they may request removal from the registry before then. Within that time span, you may be identified as one of several potential matches for someone. You may also be the only match for a sick patient.

Many people have questions about some of

the risks and inconveniences to donating bone marrow. You are encouraged to find out more about how donating might affect you. The choice to join the registry and donate bone marrow takes careful thought and consideration. It's a more involving process than blood donation; however, the rewards from potentially saving a life may be worth it.

To find out more about the Be the Match® bone marrow registry and donating bone marrow, please visit the National Marrow Donor Program website, at [www.marrow.org](http://www.marrow.org), or call 1-800-MAR-ROW2.

Sources:

<sup>1</sup> Bone Marrow and Cord Blood Donation and Transplantation. 2010.

<http://bloodcell.transplant.hrsa.gov/DONOR/index.html>. Accessed on December 20th, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> World Marrow Donor Association. 2010. "Share Life." <http://www.worldmarrow.org/>. Accessed on December 20th, 2010.

All facts and data are taken from the National Marrow Donor Program website unless explicitly indicated.



Celia Chan is a graduate student at Tufts University in Boston, MA. She is a candidate for the MS in Health Communication degree and expects to graduate in May 2011.