

Media Information



The C.W. Bill Young Department of Defense Marrow Donor Recruitment and Research Program, also known as Salute to Life, works with military personnel, their dependents, DoD civilian employees, Reservists, Coast Guard and National Guard members to facilitate marrow and stem cell donations. Since our inception in 1991, we have recruited more than 1 million individuals in the fight against blood cancer and other fatal diseases.

Public Law 101-302 established this program and gave it exclusive responsibility to recruit and manage military and military-affiliated hematopoietic stem cell donors. (The National Marrow Donor Program and its partners and affiliates manage the general population of donors.) Our organization is designed to accommodate the scheduling and security needs of military personnel and our donors never bear the cost of registration or donation.

Hematopoietic stem cells are pluripotent (immature) blood cells which give rise to differentiated blood cells (ex: functional red or white blood cells). They are found in the marrow (soft center of large bones) and can be used to treat a wide variety of diseases including leukemia, lymphoma, multiple myeloma, and severe aplastic anemia. Healthy stem cells are transplanted from donors to recipients – whose unhealthy blood-making cells are destroyed ahead of transplant – where they engraft (settle in the bones) and begin making new, healthy blood cells.

Each year, more than 20,000 individuals are diagnosed with a disease that requires a stem cell transplant (HRSA, 2018). Since 1991, Salute to Life has coordinated more than 8,100 cell donations.

Key to the success of transplantation is the ability to “match” the Human Leukocyte Antigen (HLA) profiles of donor and recipient – aligning the types as closely as possible so that the recipient’s immune system does not recognize the donor’s cells as foreign invaders and attack. Matches are more likely found among family members, but approximately 70% of people in need of transplant are unable to find an appropriate match within their families and require an unrelated donor (NMDP, 2018).

Upon registration, donors’ HLA types are determined, identified with a unique nine-digit Donor Identification Number, and entered into a national database. Once selected, donors are given complete physical examinations and thorough education regarding donation methods. Traditional bone marrow donation is done under general anesthesia and involves extraction of a small amount of marrow (usually less than 5% of the body’s supply) from the hip bone using a needle. Peripheral blood stem cell (PBSC) donation is a newer method which involves several days of medication which causes the stem cells to migrate from the bones to the blood, followed by a day where these cells are gathered using a special blood filtering (apheresis) machine. In either case, the collected cells are hand carried by couriers to the recipient so that they may be infused within 48 hours. The entire donation process is both highly regulated and carefully coordinated to protect both donor and recipient.

Our Donor Center exists thanks to the daily efforts of members and affiliates of the U.S. military and Department of Defense. We extend our deepest appreciation to our donors and honor their selfless acts. Together, we offer hope and salute life.

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