



DONATING TO SAVE OTHERS

By Rasa Kabaila

Over a year ago I placed my name on the bone marrow register but was told, 'don't ever expect to be picked as it's nearly impossible to be a tissue match for someone needing a transplant'. Yet six months later I was contacted by the Bone Marrow Transplant Centre and was asked if I was available to donate, to which I said yes. This is my firsthand account of being a stem cell donor. A month before stem cell donation I'm being flown to Sydney with my brother as my companion carer for a full day of medical testing.

From arriving, after the 7:20am flight, my day is taken up by a series of blood tests, an ECG, chest xray, examination by the doctor and a counselling session. I am also given instructions on how to take growth hormone injections prior to the procedure and then there is more debriefing with one of the donor coordinators over lunch.

I ask the cancer nurse why people think that the bone marrow transplant is so aggressive and if it used to be a difficult procedure in the past. The

cancer nurse assures me that the procedure has always been safe and straightforward rather than something gruelling.

I meet with the bone marrow coordinator, and ask how likely it is to find a bone marrow tissue match for someone needing a transplant. She says that if everyone in Australia had no choice but to be on the register, the recipient in need would have a one in 40,000 chance of finding their tissue match. But as it stands, with the amount of people who are registered, people needing a transplant have one in a million chance of finding their match.

The night before the procedure I'm now preparing for the big day tomorrow. Tonight my sister and I fly to Sydney. At 8:15am tomorrow I'll have needles in my arms and will be going through the stem cell donation procedure.

I have one more lot of growth hormone injections to take tonight with an extra batch ready to go tomorrow if needed. This is day four of the injections. It's been a bit of an out of body experience, my energy levels switch between being overactive, really tired and then spaced out. I knew to anticipate bone pain; at times it feels like an acute stabbing or radiating pain and at other times, more of an achy flu like feeling. I've asked for panadeine fort as it was getting a bit hard to manage.

The nurses inform me that most people manage the pain with panadol

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or panadeine. I normally have a good pain threshold. Perhaps I'm feeling like this because I'm a bit nervous, or maybe my body is just a bit more sensitive to the injections?

I've still been exercising, but the pace and intensity of how I have been doing things for the last few days has certainly decreased.

Either way, this is absolutely nothing compared to side effects that people experience from cancer treatments, which puts everything back into perspective.

Day of procedure:


I'm sitting here in the hotel room post procedure. The stem cell donation was a success. Apparently my stem cell count was huge (this is a good thing) which explains why I've had a lot of pain. I won't need to take any more growth hormone injections or need to go in for a bone marrow harvest tomorrow. I'll continue to have joint pain for a few more days and that will be the end of it.

The hardest thing during the procedure was not being able to move my arms. My sister, volunteers and nurses were kind to me and fed me food and gave me water. They also taped together a few straws so I was able to scratch my face.

The procedure really did feel just like a plasma donation, with both arms being used, nothing too out of the ordinary. As the procedure was finishing, I could hear an elderly man vomiting as a result of his cancer treatment. This really made me appreciate that feeling ill for a few days in order to do a stem cell transplant is really nothing compared to what people are going through when they need a donation.

This has been a once in a lifetime experience, and a very positive one. I hope that through writing this article, more people will consider placing themselves on the bone marrow register. As a previous donor once said, 'Who knows, maybe one day you will need this.'

For more information about how to be on the bone marrow register list go to: www.abmdr.org.au/ or call: 02 9234 2405

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