

South Africans challenged to become bone marrow donors

The Jupiter Drawing Room Cape Town, a long-standing supporter of The Sunflower Fund, has produced a new 30-second ad that highlights the fund's National Bandana Day Campaign and the need for new donors, especially those from Black, Coloured and Indian origin. The new TVC flights on SABC, eTV, eNCA, DStv, SuperSport and Cinemark.



All of us have an ethnic background and origin eg most white South Africans have some German or Dutch heritage for instance. When searching for a match, the registry is looking for a 'genetic twin', someone who carries the same genetic markers as the person in need of a donor and this will be unique to his or her race. Therefore, it is almost impossible for an Indian person to match a White person; a Black person cannot match an Asian person and so on.

The Fund was officially registered in 2000 and today has successfully recruited over 67,000 registered donors onto the South African Bone Marrow Registry. While this figure is impressive, it is not close to the 400,000 target which the Fund has set itself, which is because the average South African does not know how simple it is to become a donor.

Ross Chowles, Executive Creative Director at Jupiter says, "The problem we currently face is that the South African Bone Marrow Registry does not represent the population demographics for the country and only about 20% of the registry is made up of people of colour. This means that patients of colour have very little hope of finding a match. Due to our unique mixes, South African Black, Coloured and Indian people will really only find their match here in South Africa. There is a desperate need for donors from all ethnic groups and mixed ethnic backgrounds.

Matching procedure painless

To find out if you are able to donate, potential donors need to have a small blood sample (two test tubes) taken which is sent to a specialised laboratory for tissue typing. This will only take a few minutes and, if you are successful, your details are placed on the South African Bone Marrow Registry.

Local celebrities and media personalities such as Siya Kolisi, Mark Bayly, Breyton Paulse, Jen Su, Benito Vergotine and Afrika Melane, are proud supporters of the Fund and have all been registered as donors.

If you are ever found to be a match for a patient in the future, donating your bone marrow stem cells is much easier and less intrusive today. The stem (marrow) cells can be obtained by collection from the peripheral blood on a machine called a cell separator. This avoids general anaesthetic and hip punctures. It is equally efficient and comparable to bone marrow for the recipient, but much less pain and trouble for the donor. It is much like donating blood or platelets.

Jupiter and The Sunflower Fund urge South Africans to buy their bandanas from Pick n Pay or their local Round Table and to take the time to register as a potential donor to save someone's life and give patients suffering from life threatening blood disorders, a future.

View the TVC

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