
HEALTH

Mom seeks a miracle in China

ADOPTED GIRL NEEDS MARROW TRANSPLANT

BY JACQUELINE BAYLON
jbaylon@sacbee.com

Katie Cramer needs the connections.

She lies in a bed at Kaiser Permanente Medical Center, Roseville, undergoing chemotherapy for leukemia, hugging a stuffed collie to remind her of her dog at home, cradling her cell phone to talk to friends, typing on her laptop for information about her illness and about China, her mother's next stop in the fight to save her daughter.

Sherrie Cramer left Thursday for China, where Katie is from.

Cramer knows her adopted daughter needs a bone marrow transplant and that the best opportunity lies half a world away where the marrow matches are most likely and where, she dreams, she might find Katie's birth parents.

MARROW | Page B4

MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT BONE MARROW DONATION

Myth: Marrow donation is painful.

Fact: General or regional anesthesia is used for the procedure. Donors feel no needle injections and no pain during the marrow-donation process. Afterward, most donors feel some pain in the lower back for a few days or longer.

Myth: All marrow donations involve surgery.

Fact: There are two ways to donate. The majority of donations do not involve surgery. The patient's doctor most commonly requests a peripheral blood stem cell donation, which is a non-surgical, outpatient procedure. If the patient's doctor requests marrow, marrow donation is a surgical procedure, usually outpatient.

Myth: Pieces of bone are removed from

the donor.

Fact: In marrow donation, only the liquid marrow found inside the bones is collected. In a PBSC donation, cells are collected from the bloodstream in a process similar to plasma collection.

Myth: Donating marrow is dangerous and weakens the donor.

Fact: Though no medical procedure is without risk, there are rarely long-term effects to donors. Only 5 percent or less of a donor's marrow is needed to save a life. After donation, the body replaces the donated marrow within four to six weeks.

Myth: Marrow donation involves a lengthy recovery.

Fact: PBSC donors take the drug

filgrastim for five days leading up to donation and may have symptoms such as headache, bone or muscle pain, nausea, insomnia or fatigue during this time. The symptoms nearly always disappear a day or two after donating. Marrow donors can expect to feel fatigue, some soreness or pressure in their lower back and perhaps some discomfort walking. Marrow donors can expect to be back to work, school and other activities in one to seven days. The average time for all symptoms to disappear is 21 days.

Myth: Donors have to pay for the donation procedure.

Fact: Donors never pay for donating and are never paid to donate. All medical costs are paid by the patient's medical insurance or by the patient.

Marrow: Match for Katie must be perfect

FROM PAGE B1

"This provides the best hope for my daughter," Cramer said.

Katie, 16, has acute myeloid leukemia, a fatal blood disease. The transplant might save her, but Asians make up only 7 percent of the bone marrow registry here.

"A Chinese person is more likely to match Katie than a white person, but it may be necessary to find someone from her Chinese subculture to match perfectly," said Dr. Kent Jolly, a pediatric oncologist and Katie's doctor since she was first diagnosed in 2006.

Katie found out in April that her leukemia had come back. The first time, she had several rounds of chemotherapy, which put the cancer into remission.

This time, the transplant is vital.

Sherrie Cramer and husband, Michael, have held drives and been in contact with the Minneapolis-based National Marrow Donor Program, but those efforts have been fruitless.

Sherrie Cramer will be in China until next Saturday to encourage bone marrow drives in Katie's native province, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous region.

With the help of the Asian American Donor Program, Cramer will set up bone marrow drives through the Chinese Marrow Donor program. Cramer does not speak Chinese, so she will be accompanied by a translator.

The Sacramento family adopted Katie in May 1995, when she was 14 months old.

"Though it would be like finding a needle in a haystack, we must try," Cramer said of her trip to Guangxi Zhuang to seek a donor match.



MICHAEL ALLEN JONES mjones@sacbee.com

Katie Cramer, 16, is undergoing chemotherapy and biding time with her father and siblings at Kaiser Permanente Medical Center, Roseville.

'Every possible thing'

The National Marrow Donor Program, which runs the Be the Match registry in the United States, has more than 8 million donors registered here. Only 550,000 of them are Asian.

Fran McDermott, district manager for Northern California and Northwest District of the national program, said people of many ethnic groups don't become donors because they're not informed about the need, or for cultural reasons. Some Asian cultures, for example, don't believe in donating part of the body.

Meanwhile, everyone has a white blood cell type, and that type is used to determine if a donor and a patient might match. There are many genes that make up the type, and it's uncommon for any two people to have the exact same type.

"It takes several hundred

thousand people of your same race to find an unrelated person with the same (gene) combo as you, and there will be no one to match you in an unrelated race," McDermott said.

Katie needs to find a 100 percent match.

"There is only about one chance in four that a brother or sister will have the same type," said Jolly. "So unless you have many brothers and sisters, it takes millions of unrelated volunteers to find a few other people who match your type."

The better the match, Jolly said, "the better the new immune system will get along with the rest of her body, preventing rejection of the marrow and preventing damage of her organs."

The Wells family from Wisconsin, facing a similar struggle, found a match for adopted daughter Kailee by returning

HOW TO HELP

To register to become a potential marrow or stem cell donor, contact:

■ Asian American Donor Program
www.aadp.org or (800) 593-6667
■ Be the Match Registry:
(800) 627-7692 or
www.bethematch.org

» VIDEO:
videos.
sacbee.com

to China. The Cramers have followed the Wellses' story and talked to them on the phone.

"I would advise them to not give up," Linda Wells said of the Cramers' search. "If they have to look back, they want to see that they did every possible thing."

Katie is no complainer

The chemotherapy Katie is undergoing is intensive enough that she has to remain hospitalized during her treatments.

"Chemotherapy is going to make her very infection-prone, temporarily, but it will, hopefully, kill the cancer so that she remains healthy enough to wait while the marrow search goes on," Jolly said.

Katie sits up on her bed with the help of a stack of pillows. The windows in her room are decorated by friends who have visited.

When relatives and friends ask Katie how she is doing, she says, "I'm good. Maybe a little nauseated, but other than that, I'm good."

"Katie is not a complainer," Sherrie Cramer said. "She is a strong girl, but this is an obviously difficult time for her physically, as well as emotionally."

This isn't the summer that Katie wanted. She had planned to go to camp and help out her church group.

For now, inside the room on the fourth floor, she watches her favorite TV show, "The Bachelorette," on Mondays. The rest of the week, she reads, browses through her Facebook page or plays cribbage with her father, or her brother and sister, David and Anna, who also were adopted from China.

"Home is where your heart is," Sherrie Cramer said. "And sometimes that is a hospital room."

Call The Bee's Jacqueline Baylon, (916) 321-1036