



# Why Multiracials Need Bone Marrow Donors "OOOOOOO

Hapa Health Identity — 29 April 2011

Multiracial people used to be referred to as "mixed blood" or "half blooded". While those terms may be outdated and derogatory, when it comes to finding a bone marrow donor, it literally does come down to genetic mix.

Did you know that mixed-race people have especially difficult odds of finding a bone marrow donor in the event of leukemia or rare blood diseases? For mixed patients, their monoracial parents and relatives will not likely match them. Even among their siblings, the odds are only one in four of finding a donor. While multiethnic people are the largest growing minority group, they are also the smallest percentage in bone marrow registries. That's why in 2009, a non-profit organization called Mixed Marrow was created to address that need.

## Multiracial, Lower Odds of Finding a Match

Every year, over 30,000 people are diagnosed in the US with life threatening blood diseases, such as leukemia. For many patients, a bone marrow transplant is their only chance at survival. While the overall chances of finding a donor match in the family is 30%, the odds are much lower for a multiethnic person.

Currently, only 2% of registered donors are mixed-race. And41% of mixed-race people are under eighteen years old — too young to donate. Because not all mixes are the same combination, the actual odds of a mixed race patient finding a match is lower than 2% because of the variety of possible mixes in the registry.

## **Asian Cultural Barriers**

It is hard enough for Asians — who are already underrepresented in bone marrow registries — to find a match. Cultural barriers that prevent many Asian Americans from "donating" part of their body, and the idea can be a little scary. I finally registered myself as a potential donor several years ago, when my church held a drive through the Asian American Donor Program for a Taiwanese woman in Texas, who was the relative of one of our members.

The odds are even smaller for a Hapa person, who will probably need a donor who is specifically of the same ethnic blend: ie. my children would need a donor who is also Taiwanese-English-Irish, not just say, Asian and white. Race and ethnicity hold an important role because six antigens (markers on your cells) must line up between the patient and donor to create a perfect match. These antigens are inherited, so a match is more likely if the donor comes from a similar ethnic background. The patients who have the hardest time finding a match are those of Asian-African or Asian-Hispanic descent.

Cord-banking could be especially useful for Hapa children, because of the increased complexity of of finding a bone marrow donor. Unfortunately, like most parents we know, my husband and I did not opt for umbilical cord banking for our children (it just sounded like a creepy, paranoid scam preying upon the fears of new parents). If we had known about the difficulties multiethnic children face in finding a donor match, we might have given it more thought. The most important thing now, is to encourage mixed-race adults to be tested and registered as potential bone marrow donors.

## **Mixed Marrow Documentary**

Filmmaker Jeff Chiba Stearns, who I recently interviewed for "One Big Hapa Family", feels so strongly about the importance of these increasingly complex medical issues that he is working on his next documentary, "Mixed Match" about this topic. He currently working with an LA-based group called Mixed Marrow and interviewing patients about their experiences. You can get updates on this project through the "Mixed Match" Facebook page.

## **Upcoming Bone Marrow Marrow Drives**

UCLA: Wednesday, May 4th, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m., Court of Sciences (south campus). The drive is being hosted with the Hapa Club and Mixed Student Union from UCLA.

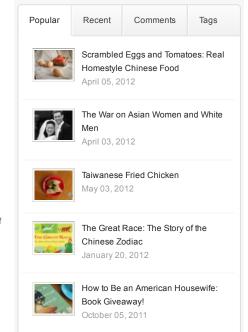
Various Locations, June 11-12, 2011 - Loving Day drives planned, more details to come.

## ha•pa (hä'pä) ೨೦೦೦೦೦೦೦೦೦೦೦

adj. 1. Slang. of mixed ethnic heritage with partial roots in Asian and/or Pacific Islander ancestry. n. 2. Slang. a person of such ancestry. [der./Hawaiian: hapa haole. (half white)]

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Did you participate in umbilical cord banking? Are you registered as a bone marrow donor?

Spread the word... share this article with your friends.

For more articles that might be of interest to you, check out the Multicultural Awareness Blog Carnival at Bicultural Mom.



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\*I Am Flippish!" Tackles Mixed-Race Issues For Children

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Tara

2011/05/01 AT 2:53 PM

Wow! Thank you for posting this article! You've provided great information here. I've never thought about this....



Grace

2011/05/01 AT 3:36 PM

Thanks! I'm glad you found this information useful. I hadn't learned about these medical issues until recently and wished someone had told me about this when my kids were born. Hopefully lots of mixed-race people will join the bone marrow database!

I look forward to checking out your blog, too.

Pingback: Multiculturalism (Carnival Entries) | Bicultural Mom



Jen Marshall Duncan

2011/05/02 AT 4:14 PM

Thank you for enlightening me! I have three mixed race children and a new niece who is black and Filipina. I had never ever thought of the implications their mixed heritage would have on bone marrow. As my children and niece get older, I will encourage them to register to be donors. Very interesting post!







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Grace

#### 2011/05/02 AT 4:18 PM

Thanks, Jen! Yes, it will be an important issue for our kids' generation as they grow older. Thank you for visiting!



### Chantilly Patiño

#### 2011/05/02 AT 4:35 PM

Grace, this is really great! Only recently did I hear about Mixed Marrow and until your post, I had no idea how difficult it can be for multiracial individuals to find bone marrow donors! It never even crossed my mind! I'm really glad that you wrote about this topic and are helping to make people more aware of the issue. Thanks so much for contributing to the multicultural carnival! =)



### Ezzy Guerrero-Languzzi

#### 2011/05/02 AT 6:15 PM

Grace, I had no idea. During my pregnancy, I waffled (with my husband) over whether or not to do the cord banking, for that very reason — it seemed like a scam and just plain weird. I'm Mexican and my husband is Italian, so our son would fall into this mixed category. I'm going to look into this and into becoming a registered donor. Thank you so much for writing about it.



#### Msleetobe

## 2011/05/04 AT 8:56 PM

Oh my goodness, I've never thought about this. I'm O-, which puts me at great risk living in Korea with the Rh- numbers so low here, so I've been involved in Rh- activism here, but I've never though about bone marrow. We're at the stage of starting to think about starting a family, so cord banking is now something I need to research. I'll be sharing it with people we know in our situtation. Thanks for this post!!!

Pingback: On Bone Marrow Registry and Multiracial/ethnic Children « On Becoming a Good Korean (Feminist) Wife



#### Grace

#### 2011/05/04 AT 10:34 PM

Yes, I wish I had known about this earlier. But at least we can raise awareness for more people to get tested and entered into the donor database. Please spread the word in your community. Thanks for reading, Msleetobe!

Pingback: Be The One Run: Help Mixed Marrow Find a Donor for Krissy Kobata | HapaMama



#### Krystal

### 2011/12/30 AT 9:00 AM

I really wish the cord blood banking wouldve said something about this when I had my daughter! I didnt even know about this and if I had I wouldnt even have thought twice about having her blood banked. She is German, Italian, American Indian, Himalayan Indian, Carib,

Spaniard, and Mexican. Talk about an impossible person to match Now Im going to pray that we never have to face this problem



### 2011/12/31 AT 10:14 AM

Krystal, I can completely relate. That's why I find it so important to help spread the word whenever there is a mixed-race person in need of a bone marrow transplant. And yes, let's pray that our loved ones never have to face this problem. Thanks for stopping by!



## Talking Thirty

### 2012/01/15 AT 1:45 PM

Wow, this is probably the most informative blog post I've ever read (and I've read LOTS). I had no idea about this and really wish I had read it 6 months ago when my first child was born. He's half Chinese and half German/French/English/who knows what else. We didn't chose to have his cord blood banked. Having read your post, I will definitely consider doing it for my next child. My husband is Caucasian and is a mix of so many different ethnicities. It would be difficult for us to find a donor with the same ethnic blend when we're not entirely sure of my husband's "blend" either. Thank you for posting.



### Grace

## 2012/01/21 AT 8:04 PM

In the case of a person who is half Italian and half Irish, it is generally not as hard to find a match, because those ethnicities are more commonly mixed in the US. But hopefully, more donors of all backgrounds will sign up, increasing the chances for everybody.

Thanks for stopping by!

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