

WSU faculty member fulfills a promise to her sister

By Anthony Kuipers, Daily News staff writer | Posted: Tuesday, June 14, 2016 12:00 am

Around the time Tacoma woman Donna King found out she didn't have very long to live, the cancer patient made a request to her sister.

She wanted more people to know about national bone marrow registries, so they can learn how to help patients with blood cancers like multiple myeloma, the type King battled.

Her sister, Debra Pastore, delivered on that request and may have helped save three lives.

Pastore, a faculty member in the Washington State University College of Education, started Be the Match on Campus, a student-driven organization aimed at raising awareness about the benefits of donating bone marrow to cancer patients. It also helps students get on the national bone marrow registry led by the national organization, Be the Match.

Pastore got started on creating the campus chapter in 2013, the same year her sister died. Shortly after King's passing, Pastore saw an article in The Daily Evergreen explaining the purpose of Be the Match. She immediately recognized it as a sign.

"I thought, there it is," she said.

She called a national representative for advice on how to get a chapter started at WSU. Other universities were just beginning to do the same, she said.

After some more time and effort, she enlisted the help of students and started to organize registry drives in 2015.

Students who participate in a registry drive can have the inside of their cheeks swabbed for DNA, which will be sent to the Be the Match headquarters in Minneapolis.

If they are found to be a match with someone, the organization will help them get to a facility where they can donate to the patient with all expenses paid, Pastore said.

In her office, Pastore is reminded every day of why she is taking on this challenge.

A photo of Pastore alongside her sister sits atop a file cabinet, while the same image serves as her screensaver.



Fulfilling a promise to her sister

Debra Pastore helps direct the Be the Match on Campus organization at Washington State University in Pullman as the faculty adviser. The club encourages students to join the national bone marrow registry.

King, like Pastore, was a WSU graduate. Even when she moved away from Pullman, King would still return every year to see the Lentil Festival, Pastore said.

King was 54 years old with two children in high school when she found out her fate from the doctor. Pastore can't fathom what it would be like for a mother to hear that news.

"I don't know how you wrap your head around that," Pastore said.

"But she did it with bravery and grace."

Pastore donated her own bone marrow to King after finding out they were a match. Pastore said family members have a 30 percent chance of being a match.

That was her introduction to the bone marrow registry, she said.

"Before I had to do this for my sister, I had no idea this existed," she said.

Outside the family, the odds of finding a match are slim, about 1 in 540 people, she said.

That's why Pastore is proud of Be the Match on Campus. She said so far, out of about 250 students who have participated, there have been three matches. She said the odds of that are "remarkable."

"I started this hoping there would be at least one life saved, and now there are three," she said.

Her goal is to have two registry drives per semester this upcoming school year.

One of the challenges is getting people comfortable with the idea of donating. For example, she said, many people are familiar with, and afraid of, the old method of having bone marrow removed through the hip.

Pastore said while that method is still used, it is employed less often and is significantly less painful than it used to be, thanks to modern medicine.

The more common method, called apheresis, involves donating blood through the arm. A machine extracts the stem cells from that blood, which are then given to the cancer patient. According to the National Cancer Institute, these same stem cells are contained in bone marrow.

Pastore is hoping more people will familiarize themselves with the bone marrow registry. Be the Match on Campus, a group of about 10 students, spreads the word about the bone marrow registry through its drives and promotional tables at the Compton Union Building on campus, Pastore said.

For more information, visit BetheMatch.org, or email Pastore at dpastore@wsu.edu.

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