



The Sunflower Fund

Partnered by DKMS

MEDIA RELEASE

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WOMEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF STEM CELL REGISTRY EFFORTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

[August 2020] In many sectors of society, women often lag behind their male counterparts when it comes to opportunities to pioneer and lead. Stem cell transplantation, although it has been a life-saving treatment for patients with blood disorders since the 1950's, is still a relatively new subject for most people.

However, the organisation at the forefront of growing an ethnically diverse registry of stem cell donors in South Africa, The Sunflower Fund partnered by DKMS, has for the past 20 years been leading education and recruitment efforts under the leadership of women.

"Women have not only been at the helm of the organisation with me being the 3rd female CEO, but have also been foremost in their response to become donors," says Alana James CEO of The Sunflower Fund.

"If we look at our stats for donors recruited this year alone, 71% of donors are female versus 29% male," added James.

The Sunflower Fund recently signed a collaboration agreement with DKMS, the largest network of stem cell registries in the world. The DKMS network of registries operates in six countries and has more than 10 million donors registered.

"Within this network, we also see that 61% of registered donors are female," continued James.

Women have always been known to be the primary caregivers who take the lead in helping families and communities. Their nurturing nature makes them the first to respond when help is needed.

"With our vision to save lives by ensuring more patients make it to transplant, it is clear that South Africa still has a desperate shortage of donors compared to registries in other parts of the world," adds James.

For a patient in need of a blood stem cell transplant, there is only a 25% chance that a family member will be a match. The remaining 75% depends on an unrelated stranger being a match. Donor matches are not as simple as matching blood type. A patient in search of a stem cell donor is essentially looking for a genetic twin, someone considered to be a DNA match. There is a 1 in 100 000 chance of finding a match, therefore it is vital to build an ethnically diverse registry of potential donors, to reduce the waiting period for patients when a search is activated.

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A stem cell transplant is often the only hope of cure for individuals with blood disorders like leukaemia, Thalassaemia and sickle cell disease to name a few.

“During women’s month we want to thank the women in South Africa that have responded to the call to become stem cell donors. Women are a force change and as we aim to change the lives of patients who are still searching and who will need a donor in the future, we hope that more women will become a part of the solution for patients with blood disorders,” concluded James.

Individuals between the ages of 18 and 55 years can become donors. If you have a consistent weight of more than 50kgs and a BMI of less than 40 you could be eligible to become a donor.

Registration can be done from the comfort of your home online by visiting www.sunflowerfund.org or calling 0800 12 10 82.

The Sunflower Fund partnered by DKMS covers the cost of the tissue-typing test involved in becoming a donor. Registration is free and voluntary, however donations are welcome as The Sunflower Fund relies on various fundraising efforts to do the life-saving work they do as well as to build the patient support fund to assist individuals who cannot afford the cost associated with a transplant.

For more information or to make a financial contribution visit www.sunflowerfund.org.

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About The Sunflower Fund

The Sunflower Fund partnered by DMKS is a donor recruitment centre and stem cell registry for Africa and is part of a global network, dedicated to creating awareness about blood diseases and stem cell donation, recruiting blood stem cell donors and maintaining a registry of committed donors.

The Sunflower Fund partnered by DKMS pays for the cost of the tissue-type testing. This is fundamental to saving the lives of South Africans and patients globally who need a stem cell transplant. The chance of finding a matching donor is 1 in 100,000 – and as ethnic origin plays a significant role in the search for a donor, South Africa’s rainbow nation is at a distinct disadvantage, requiring a large pool of prospective donors.

About DKMS

DKMS is an international non-profit organisation dedicated to the fight against blood cancer. Founded in 1991 in Germany by Dr. Peter Harf, DKMS has expanded internationally in recent years by establishing entities in the US, Poland, the UK, Chile, together with BMST in India and in South Africa together with The Sunflower Fund partnered by DKMS. Together, they have



registered more than 9.9 million potential blood stem cell donors and have given more than 84,000 patients across the globe a second chance at life by facilitating blood stem cell transplants.

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