



The Sunflower Fund

Partnered by DKMS

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

EQUITABLE HEALTHCARE KEY FOR SOUTH AFRICANS LIVING WITH BLOOD DISORDERS

[17 March 2021, Cape Town] Every 27 seconds someone across the globe is diagnosed with a blood disease and their only chance of survival is a stem cell transplant. However, access to healthcare remains a challenge in South Africa, with many people living with blood diseases struggling to afford treatment. As such, it is vital for stakeholders in the health sector to facilitate services with a patient-focused approach to improve access to treatment and medication this Human Rights Day.

This is according to Alana James, CEO at the Sunflower Fund partnered by DKMS and recently appointed Chairperson of the Cape Chamber of Commerce & Industry's Healthcare Portfolio, who says a patient-centric approach places practitioners, patients, and their families into alignment with patients' wants, needs, and preferences.

"As life-threatening blood disorders like leukaemia are mainly treated with stem cell transplants, at The Sunflower Fund partnered by DKMS, we recruit stem cell donors and maintain a registry of potential donors committed to helping anyone in need of a life-saving transplant," she says. "However, another large part of our business is to maintain a support fund to assist patients who are unable to afford costs associated with getting a transplant as well as being actively involved in creating a platform for support structures to assist patients, families and communities."

To illustrate the high costs associated with a disease such as blood cancer, for example, James points to two estimates by the Independent Clinical Oncology Network in South Africa which reveal that cancer treatment can cost anything between R100 000 and R1 million per year. "This includes costs for diagnosis, pathology, chemotherapy and stem-cell transplants, to name a few. However, according to Cancer Research UK, the cost of cancer drugs is increasing by 10% per year."

Furthermore, James says that the latest General Household Survey conducted in 2018 by Statistics South Africa revealed that only 16.4% of people in the country are on medical aid. "As such, many people living with blood diseases need to access healthcare in the public sector which has been under strain for many years and only exacerbated by COVID-19."

"For example, we have seen many patients denied access to the necessary healthcare they need due to hospitals being overwhelmed and understandably needing to prioritise COVID-19 patients," she adds. "However, as access to healthcare is a basic human right according to the South African constitution, it is the collective responsibility of all healthcare stakeholders to ensure this ideal is realised sooner than later."

The Sunflower Fund NPC, Reg. No: 2000/008979/08, VAT Reg. No. 4350236958
Non-Profit Organisation Reg. No.: 020-728-NPO
Public Benefit Organisation (section 18A) Reg. No : 130000158
In Terms of Section 18A(2) of the Income Tax, No. 58 of 1962

PO Box 31163 Tokai 7966 Cape Town, South Africa
Block C, Grosvenor Square, Century Way, Century City, 7441
Telephone: 021 701 0661 • e-mail: info@sunflowerfund.org
Regional offices: Johannesburg and Durban



The Sunflower Fund

Partnered by DKMS

“To improve access to healthcare it is essential for the public and private sector to facilitate discussions to improve the healthcare ecosystem in South Africa,” she adds. “As healthcare stakeholders, our foremost role is to share learnings and knowledge while facilitating room for engagement to advocate for patient care and patient access.”

“At the end of the day, our patients are at the heart of our business and our aim is to advocate for equitable access to healthcare services and medication in the country to minimise suffering and lower the threat of life threatening blood disorders in South Africa,” concludes James.

-ENDS-

About The Sunflower Fund partnered by DKMS

The Sunflower Fund partnered by DKMS 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.

Released on behalf of The Sunflower Fund by:

Nabiella De Beer

nabiella@eclipsepr.co.za

Cell: 074 697 8102

ENDS