

Paediatric Haemato-oncology collaborates with UMS, Allergy and Immunology Research Centre on Hematopoietic Stem Cell donor recruitment campaign

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KOTA KINABALU: For the very first time, the hospital Paediatric Haemato-oncology Unit in collaboration with the Faculty of Medicine of UMS and the Allergy and Immunology Research Centre of the Institute for Medical Research is embarking on a Hematopoietic Stem Cell donor recruitment campaign to get as many Sabahans as possible to pledge as unrelated stem cell donors.

The awareness campaign which took place at the Recital Hall of UMS is aimed to increase awareness among healthcare workers and the public regarding the Hematopoietic stem cell transplant and also to organise a Hematopoietic stem cell donor recruitment in assisting the life threatening blood disorder such as leukemia, aplastic anemia and thalassemia to name a few.

Elaborating on the campaign yesterday, Health Director Dr Christina Rundi emphasized about the source of stem cells that can be obtained from peripheral blood instead of only from the painful bone marrow harvesting process.

However she said that it is hard to find identical matches for Sabahan patients because compatibility types

largely follows ethnic lines.

“Voluntary stem cell donors are very important to offer these group patients a second chance, the gene pool of our people are very diverse and this makes them unique, therefore to obtain a Human Leukocyte Antigen (HLA) matched of unrelated donor for our patients from the Malaysian Stem Cell Registry (MSCR) is very difficult at this point of time. One of the reasons is due to lack of Sabahan donors,” she said.

She said it is crucial to have a sizeable contribution of donors from Sabah in order to increase the chances of a successful HLA matched donor for local patients as there is a better chance of a match for local patients if the donors are sought from the Sabah gene pool.

Earlier Christina also informed that the transplant service began at Sabah Women and Children’s Hospital in Likas in 2014,

Prior to that, patients needed to travel to Kuala Lumpur for stem cell transplantation.

According to her, the transplant team in Sabah Women and Children’s Hospital has performed 10 matched sibling transplants whereby one for chronic myeloid leukemia, two for beta-thalassemia and seven for severe aplastic anemia. Nine transplants were successful.

Traditionally, stem cell transplant process is performed using



Christina sounds the 'gong' to mark the start of the campaign.

match-sibling bone marrow donor which are usually sourced from the patient's own siblings. But there is now a shift towards using non-related donors with equally good results.

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marrow harvesting process.

In Malaysia, there are two stem cell registries situated at the Cord Blood Bank, Pusat Darah Negara in Kuala Lumpur and the Malaysian Stem Cell Registry (MSCR), Institute for Medical Research, also in Kuala Lumpur.

Also present during the campaign

were Paediatric Haemato-oncologist of the Sabah Women and Children’s Hospital in Likas, Dr Kogilavani Gunasagar, Deputy Dean (Academic & Hep), Faculty of Medicine and Health Science of UMS, Prof. Dr Ahmad Faris and the MSCR team headed by Dr Masita Arif from Institute for Medical research.