

# Wanted: Bone Marrow For Jewish Mother

London family turns to social media to help find donor for mom undergoing chemo

**Manny Kornitzer**

LONDON—A Jewish family in London, England is frantically searching for a donor match for their mother, who needs a bone marrow transplant within a matter of weeks.

When Sharon Berger, 61, was diagnosed with a preleukemic condition known as Myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS) in 2006, she was told that she would need a transplant, and has been waiting for a suitable donor ever since. But last month a severe infection led to chemotherapy treatments and increased the sense of urgency the family felt. By the end of her six-week treatment next month, Sharon must have a bone marrow transplant. And unless the Berger family finds a suitable match, they will be forced to risk using either cord blood or stem cells from Sharon's son Jonni, neither which option is an ideal match and would increase the danger of failure in an already high-risk operation.

"It really is a race against time; my mom's chemotherapy started this week which means that in six weeks time she will need a bone marrow transplant, and a good match has not yet been

found," says Jonni. "Although a match is most likely to come from someone from the Ashkenazi community, we would like to grow the bone marrow registry, so that everyone can benefit."

He points out that bone marrow donations are permissible under Jewish law, avoiding the debate which frequently accompanies the issue of organ donation.

While statistics show that 30 percent of people are lucky enough to find a match from within their families, to Sharon's misfortune her three siblings are all matches for each other, but not for her. Sharon's survival hinges on finding her perfect match.

In an effort to save their mother's life, Jonni and Caroline have launched a social media campaign to encourage members of the public to join the bone marrow register, both in the U.K. and overseas in North America (in the U.S., via the Gift of Life Bone Marrow Foundation, on the Web at [www.giftoflife.org](http://www.giftoflife.org)) and Israel. They named their Twitter campaign #Spit4Mum to emphasize the quick and easy way in which people can join the British na-

tional stem-cell register—a saliva sample is all it takes to test someone's tissue type.

Sharon's children also called on those who have already joined a bone marrow registry to ensure their details are up to date. "If you can't be reached, you can't be a lifesaver," says Caroline.

"There must be a bone marrow match for Sharon out there, we just need to find them," Sharon's husband Stephen stresses. "Finding one would be better than winning the lottery for us, and although the odds seem smaller, what I would like to say to all those reading this is that it could be you; don't miss out on the chance to save a life."

Stephen is himself a volunteer courier for Anthony Nolan, and spends his free time racing across the U.K. delivering stem cells between donors and patients. "Do not think of being a donor as an arduous or disruptive procedure, this is one of the myths I am hoping to dispel... it really can be as simple as giving blood," he says.

*More details of the Spit4Mum campaign, for Sharon Berger can be gotten by contacting Jonni Berger at [jonni@thebergers.co.uk](mailto:jonni@thebergers.co.uk)*

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the types that are circulating, including a new kind of the tough H3N2 strain. That family tends to be harsher than other flu types—and health officials warned last fall that it was coming, and meant this winter would likely be tougher than last year's flu season, the mildest on record.

**Q:** But don't some people get vaccinated and still get sick?

**A:** Flu vaccine never is 100 percent effective, and unfortunately it tends to protect younger people better than older ones. But the CDC released a study showing that so far this year, the vaccine appears 62 percent effective, meaning it's working about as well as it has in past flu seasons.

While that may strike some people as low, Frieden said it's the best protection available. "It's a glass 62 percent full," he said. "It's well worth the effort."

**Q:** What else can I do?

**A:** Wash your hands often, and avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Viruses can spread by hand, not just through the air. Also, cough in your elbow, not your hand. When you're sick, protect others by staying home.

And people who are in those high-risk groups should call a doctor if they develop symptoms, added CDC spokesman Tom Skinner. They might be prescribed antiviral medication, which works best if given within the first 48 hours of symptoms.

—With Lindsey Tanner and Mike Stobbe

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can take to reduce the spread of the flu on the job: holding meetings via conference calls, staggering shifts so that fewer people are on the job at the same time, and avoiding handshaking.

Newspaper editor Rob Blackwell says he had taken only two sick days in the last two years before coming down with the flu and then pneumonia in recent weeks. He missed several days in the first week of January and has been working from home the past week.

"I kept trying to push myself to get back to work because, gen-

erally speaking, when I'm sick I just push through it," says Blackwell, the Washington bureau chief for the daily trade paper *American Banker*.

Connecticut is the only state that requires some businesses to pay employees when they are out sick. San Francisco and Washington have similar laws.

Challenger and others say attitudes are changing, and many companies are rethinking their sick policies to avoid office-wide outbreaks of the flu and other infectious diseases.

"I think companies are waking up to the fact right now that you might get a little bit of gain from a person coming into

work sick, but especially when you have an epidemic, if 10 or 20 people then get sick, in fact you've lost productivity," Challenger says.

—With Mike Stobbe in Atlanta, Eileen A.J. Connelly in New York, Paul Wiseman in Washington, Barbara Rodriguez in Des Moines, Iowa, and Jim Salter in St. Louis

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