

Campaign seeks to raise number of potential bone marrow donors

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During July ? African American Bone Marrow Awareness Month ? Tulane physician Dr. Renee Hickson has been working to get out the word that African Americans are twice as likely to be impacted by some blood cancers but least likely to find a match for life-saving transplants.



“One of the goals of Essence Fest is empowerment through awareness,” says Dr. Renee Hickson. “This drive gave people a chance to do something good and have a good time doing it.” (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

While enjoying this year's Essence Festival recently in downtown New Orleans, 602 visitors registered to help “Delete Blood Cancer” for African Americans needing stem cell or bone marrow transplants to save their lives.

Donors swabbed the inside of their cheeks to collect cells for tissue typing at a booth staffed by Hickson and others. This information will be stored anonymously on the registry monitored by the National Marrow Donor Program. Doctors search this registry, trying to find matches for their patients who need bone marrow transplants.

“We wanted to inform people of this free, simple and potentially lifesaving process,” says Hickson, a physician at the Tulane University [Student Health Center](#).

Although patients are most likely to match someone of similar ethnicity, they are often unrelated, according to Delete Blood Cancer DKMS, the nonprofit organization that sponsored donor registry booths at Woldenberg Park and in the Morial Convention Center during Essence Fest. Only about 7 percent of those currently on the registry are African American, which means many patients never receive the life-saving transplants they need.

If selected as a match, donations are made in one of two ways. A peripheral blood stem cell donation is similar to donating blood. With the second option, which requires general anesthesia, marrow is taken from the pelvic bone. Most patients experience minimal discomfort during this outpatient procedure, and the donor's cells replenish within a few weeks.

To register as a potential donor, contact Delete Blood Cancer DKMS at 1-866-340-3567 or visit the [organization's website](#) for a complimentary swabbing kit.

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