

Bone Marrow Donation – The Attitude of Service

The bone marrow donation cause is one that many don't know about. The awareness of this issue is small, and that is why it is so important to volunteer for marrow drives. It is our duty as humans and as Indians to help other citizens in need. We cannot expect our nation to flourish without ensuring that we care for and help all of our brethren. We are obligated to give back. I volunteered for Sewa USA multiple times for the bone marrow donation cause and my experience was incredible.

The first time I walked up to a stranger to inform them about the marrow donation, it was exhilarating. I had never done this before, and I was so nervous about their reactions that I kept forgetting what to say. Eventually I overcame my stammers and started being more clear and to the point. I gained confidence from this simple act of communication. I also had to develop thick skin while addressing the potential donors because many were not interested/thought I was wasting their time as they were hurrying to get their groceries in the car. But I remained persistent in my efforts to get their attention. Another thing I had learned while volunteering was to research the facts and important points of bone marrow donation so I could talk to the potential donors. I added conviction and depth to my argument so that the potential donors would really come to see the importance of bone marrow donation. I had to figure out the best way to communicate my information so it could get conveyed effectively to them.

The volunteering experience, for me, was incredible. I gained knowledge on people diagnosed with leukemia and other diseases that required marrow transplants. Their stories made me feel so grateful for every living day that I have with my family. Knowing them fueled my enthusiasm and passion for this cause.

Holding this kind of sewa event also greatly affects the community. It gives everyone a new perspective at life, and the fact that not everyone is as privileged as we are. When I first would track down a person and start talking to them, they wouldn't seem very interested. But when I started stating real cancer patients' stories and testimonials for bone marrow donation, I could visibly see their expressions soften. I feel that they were really touched.

Professor Nalini Ambady was a trailblazer. She was the first Indian American woman to teach psychology at Harvard, Tufts, *and* Stanford University. She was

known as a very kind woman. According to her daughters, she would do all she could to teach her students well and ensure their success. In an article written about her by her own daughter on CNN, I learned that she once realized a student was failing her class. Upon further investigation she came to know that he couldn't afford a textbook, so she bought one for him. Ambady also invited students over for a home-cooked Thanksgiving when she learned that they couldn't afford the plane tickets back home. The day after that Thanksgiving, she was diagnosed with lymphoma. Her family worked hard to find donors, and were overjoyed to discover 12 potential matches. She would be saved! She would live! *Alas, all 12 matches dropped out.* They were devastated and on October 28, 2013, Professor Nalini Ambady passed away because of a cancer that could have been prevented but wasn't. Because the donors decided some of their blood was too precious to save a life. This is why volunteering at drives is so important to me. Without donors, talented and loving people like Nalini will die an undeserving death.

I couldn't help but think how it would be if one of my own loved ones could not be saved because the donors dropped out. Asian Americans especially are among the lowest turnout for bone marrow donation in the US. We tend to think, "what is there for me to gain?" But I think it's important to let people know that we have the responsibility to contribute in this country, and better yet, this world.

If you are Caucasian, the chances of finding a donor is 80-85%. For Asian Americans, however, these chances are slim because we are an ethnic minority. Even if a match is found, very few actually go through with the process. Indians especially have taboos about marrow donation. People think "bone marrow" is associated with actually giving pieces of bone to the cancer victims, yet, bone marrow donation is actually just giving blood. In fact, according to AADP.org in many donations, the doctors extract the stem cells they need from your blood and actually insert much of your blood back into your body, so it's not as if you are being deprived of a lot of blood. But many do not know this, which is why I feel it's important to volunteer at drives so that people can gain awareness and knowledge about this cause.

If I was asked to do this service again, I would do it gladly. I will continue my involvement with the local bone marrow drive team because as more people with become aware of the issue and more of them are involved, more future students

will get inspired to do stem cell research. It is a privilege to be able to help another human being. My experience with the Hindu community in the USA has made me look at life differently. We talk about the central idea of Hinduism being universal brotherhood but do we actually ever apply this idea in our daily life? It is only when we develop the attitude of service to our community that we will be able to expand and thrive. As a person well raised with Hindu ideals in the family, I feel it is my responsibility to stay connected with the society I live in and with the attitude of service.