**REPORT OF PA COMMITTEE’S STEM CELL / MAKE A MATCH ZOOM EVENT – 28TH MAY 2021**

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The PA Committee’s first resolutions event of 2021, and also by zoom, was a successful debut with 29 members attending from SWFWI and other Federations too.

Annie Phillips welcomed everyone and introduced the event, which coincided with World Blood Cancer Day and DKMS’s 30th anniversary too.

The first speaker was Eirwen Phillips, Secretary of Kedington WI, and whose baby granddaughter, Lizzie, was born on the 1st October 2022 needing a bone marrow transplant. Eirwen spoke movingly of the shock of this news on the whole family and of the medical journey brave Lizzie then endured. A low point for the family was attending Lizzie’s baptism at Great Ormond Street Hospital via Zoom. Lizzie had her stem cell transplant on the 4th January 2021 and this occasion is treated at the hospital as a second birthday, so moving forwards Lizzie will have two birthdays to celebrate. The effects of the months apart, treatment and pain Lizzie endured will stay with the family for ever but they have profound thanks for the unknown young man who made this stem cell donation possible. Lizzie returned home on the 30th March to receive many cuddles and to meet her brothers for the first time.

Eirwen’s story was incredibly moving and a heartfelt thanks was given by Gwen Williams to Eirwen and Lizzie’s family being willing to share their very personal experiences to help others.

The second speaker was Hannah Thomas, Donor Recruitment Manager at DKMS, who spoke to us about the importance of blood stem cell donation and the process for registering and donating. DKMS has over 900 staff spread over seven countries, creating the largest stem cell donor register of 10.2 million people, although currently the UK only has a 2% take up of registered donors. The UK has more than 2,000 people needing a stem cell donation, which the most common of these are children and young adults.

It costs £40 for DKMS to register each donor. 3 check swabs are done which are processed to check donation eligibility, if successful then a person is added to the Stem Cell donation register. It can take 12 weeks from swabs to becoming a donor, some can be eligible after 7 weeks, a life saver in waiting. If a stem cell match is made then health checks, like body MOT, and blood tests are undertaken to ensure donor and recipient compatibility. There are two methods to donate stem cells, one similar to giving blood and the second, a bone marrow collection. This is taken from the pelvic bone under general anaesthetic requiring a week’s rest afterwards. Donors are always asked if they are happy to donate via both methods.

Donated stem cells are then placed in special cool boxes with internal temperature gauges to ensure these are kept at the correct temperature for delivery to the hospital where the stem cell transplant is taking place. If a donation is from another country then the cool boxes are exempt from being x-rayed as this can affect the stem cell donation. If transported by plane or train then two seats are booked, one for the courier and one for the special cool box. Covid-19 has greatly impacted on the transportation of stem cell donations with military flights to Germany being used to enable couriers to transport donations to and from other countries.

Covid patients can donate when fully recovered and after having both vaccine jabs. DKMS has the widest age range of donors who can, if wished, asked to be removed from the list either permanently or temporarily if say pregnant and for 6 months after giving birth.

There is a shortage of donors from ethnic communities which DKMS and other Stem Cell register organisations are launching a campaign to try and encourage both donors and stem cell recipients to come forward.

All donations are made anonymously but anonymously contact can be made via DMKS. Any letters are checked for any details that cannot be passed onto the donor. After two years, and if both sides consent, DMKS will pass on contact details so contact can be made. In France and many other countries no contact or communication is allowed.

A lively Q&A session followed along with Glen Abbassi sharing her experiences of 11 years as a Stem Cell courier for the Anthony Nolan Trust.

Gwen Williams thanked Hannah for a most interesting talk, taking us through the process of registering and donating stem cells. It most certainly highlights how important it is to raise awareness of the importance stem cell donations and also easy it is to register. This is information which WI members can either use themselves or pass on to family members and friends to encourage them to donate stem cells.

Thanks was given to Maggie Glavin and Margaret Brackenbury for their expertise and help as zoom hosts for this event. Thanks also to Annie Phillips for her impactful welcome, to Janet Brown for her help too and to everyone for attending today’s talk.

Many of our WI colleagues are not, unfortunately, in the age group to donate bone marrow, but we hope that following this event members feel better informed and inspired to promote the WI Make a Match stem cell donation campaign to their family, friends and within their own WI’s too.

More information about this WI Resolution and NFWI’s Make a Match campaign is on the MyWi website and also on SWFWI’s website, under the Resolutions tab. There is also a DKMS personalised WI registration Stem Cell donor link on both these sites too.

As Eirwen Phillips said, “it’s such a relatively easy donation to give, but the end result is truly wonderful”.

8.6.21

Stem Cell Event28.5.21GW