

Date set for DKMS Africa's Sunflower Day

Blood cancer is one of the top five cancers affecting people globally, according to Dr Estelle Verburgh, clinical haematologist and associate professor in Clinical Haematology at the University of Cape Town, and often the only hope for a cure is a blood stem cell transplantation.



Source: [Facebook](#)

In a bid to raise funds and awareness for those who are suffering from blood disorders and cancers, DKMS Africa (formerly known as the Sunflower Fund) will once again embark on its annual Sunflower Day campaign which will be celebrated on the 17 September, with its Tubes of Hope (Tope) going on sale from August.

Alana James, country executive director at DKMS Africa, says that hope is a fundamental need for those suffering from life-threatening illnesses, such as blood disorders and cancers, and in some instances, hope is all that a patient has.

Celebrating the power of hope

“It is for this very reason that the 2021 instalment of the Sunflower Day is dedicated to celebrating the power of hope,” she says. “At DKMS Africa, we believe that hope is the one underlying attribute that can get anyone through the darkest of times, and for many patients battling a blood-related illness, hope can come in the form of a second chance at life through blood stem cell donations.”

James adds that while the purpose of Sunflower Day is to create awareness and raise funds, it's also an important platform to create awareness and drive the conversation around stem cell transplantations and the associated misconceptions.

As the body's primary cells, all cells such as bodily tissue, organs and bones develop from it. The stem cells, which are found in the body's bone marrow, are responsible for creating the various types of blood cells, all with a unique job to do to keep the blood healthy. Registering to donate blood stem cells involves three DNA swabs collected from the inside of the mouth and cheeks, and can be done from the comfort of a potential donor's home.

Non-invasive, painless procedure



Alana James, country executive director, DKMS Africa

Should a candidate be a match, they will be contacted to donate. The procedure is non-invasive and painless and does not require an operation, anaesthetic or incisions. The procedure involves travelling to a collection centre to have a full medical assessment to assess the donor's suitability to donate. Donors are then required to provide a blood sample, which will be confirmed as an HLA match and screened for infectious disease markers. 30 days after the examination, blood stem cells are then collected from the donor. The process is completely free and donors only donate blood stem cells twice in their lives.

"By donating blood stem cells, everyday people become the hope patients with blood disorders and cancers need to beat their illnesses, and we urge the public to drive the conversation around the importance and need for blood stem cell transplants," says James.

Topes are available for purchase from R30 from Pick n Pay stores, selected ICPA pharmacies and online at Zando.

Those interested in becoming a donor, and are between the ages of 18-55 and in general good health, should go to www.DKMS-Africa.org for more information or call 0800121082.

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