

## | SCCS to hold blood stem cell donorship awareness campaign

BY CINDY LAI, REPORTERS@THEBORNEOPOST.COM ON NOVEMBER 4, 2017, SATURDAY AT 1:04 AM

SARAWAK



*Foo (second right) with her family in the early stage after being diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukaemia (AML).*

MIRI: When Winnie Foo was diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukaemia (AML), she almost lost all hope as her condition was at the edge of being cancerous.



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"This means the only hope of recovery is through bone marrow transplant," Foo said.

Unfortunately, as the bone marrow of her family members was not compatible, her hope for a cure was reduced to zero.

A few weeks after her diagnosis, Foo was transferred to Ampang Hospital, after she was told that blood stem cell transplantation could help.

"Ampang Hospital is one of the 11 Hematopoietic stem cells transplant centres in the country specialising in blood stem cell transplantation.

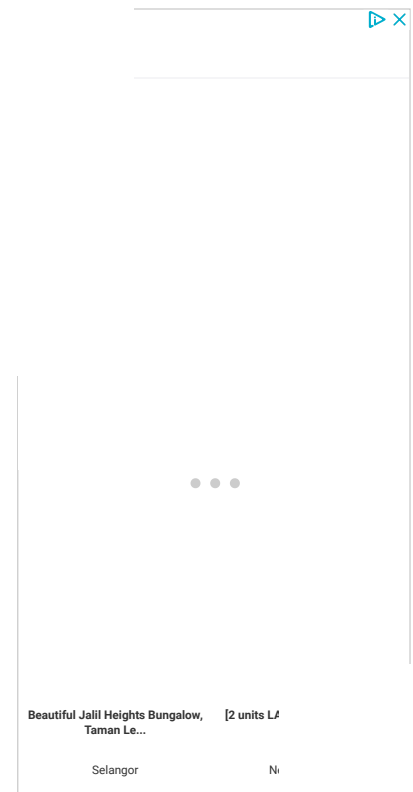
"Doctors advised my parents to search for a stem cell match from either China or Taiwan. At the time, we were also told that Taiwan seems to be our best hope as the doctors targeted at least a 60 per cent chance of compatibility," she said.

Thankfully over the span of three months after the search begun, seven matching donors were found.

Fast forward to three years later, Foo who is now 21, is on the road to recovery and is stepping out to impress upon the community the importance of stem cell donation in saving lives.

President of Sarawak Children's Cancer Society (SCCS) Jocelyn Hee said Foo's case has given hope to a lot of people with blood-related diseases.

"In recent years, we have witnessed an increased in the number of patients suffering from blood-related disease such as leukaemia, aplastic anaemia, lymphoma. This means that there is a greater need for blood stem cells transplantation for treatment to save lives," Hee said.



Hematopoietic stem cells (HSCs) are the stem cells that give rise to all the other blood cells through the process of haematopoiesis, which is vital in helping patients suffering from blood-related diseases to recover and become healthy again.

“However, due to the diversity of race and intermarriage among Malaysians, the probability of finding a matching donor for a patient is very low, especially for patients from Sarawak as volunteer donors from the state only account for about two per cent of the total number of donors.”

Hee revealed that as of September 2017, out of the total 29,300 registered volunteers with Malaysian Stem Cell Registry (MSCR), only 572 are Sarawakians.

“Therefore, we like to encourage Sarawakians to pledge as potential blood stem cell donors to increase the percentage of finding a compatible match for patients from Sarawak,” she told The Borneo Post.

Hee hoped that the seminar would also clear any misunderstanding of stem cells donation.

“People usually fear what they don’t understand. We hope that the seminar, would clear doubts and the public would be more accepting of blood stem cells donation to save lives.”

SCCS will be collaborating with MSCR and Marriot Hotel to hold a stem cell donorship awareness talk on Nov 5, 2017 (Sunday) at Marriott Hotel Resort and Spa from 2 pm to 5pm.

The talk will be covering topics including ‘How stem cell donorship can help somebody’, who is eligible to be a donor and the process involved.

“Since the campaign kicked off from Kuching, the drive has registered approximately 130 new donors. We certainly hope that more will come forward to register during our final leg in Miri,”

Hee said adding that any Malaysian aged 18-50 and free from any chronic disease may register as a volunteer donor.

Admission to the event is free but seats are limited to 100. Marriot Hotel will be providing refreshment during tea break.

For more information and reservation, contact 014-893 0591 (Audrey).



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