

Public Bone Marrow Awareness and Recruitment in different geographical regions in Greece: The volunteer program and training

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Background: Center of Bone Marrow Donor Volunteers University of Patras (CBMDP)-“Save a life” is one of the main donor centers in Greece supervised by Hellenic Transplant Organization (HTO- 4979 ION). CBMDP-“Save a life” locates in Patras and recruits donors since 2010 through live campaigns all over the country or via online registration (from 2017). Greece is a Mediterranean country with a diverse landscape, featuring both a mountainous mainland and a vast archipelago of islands. The country's vast geography poses a challenge for the center to organizing events and maintaining full staff presence.

Scope: The aim of the study is to show how our donor center overcomes these geographical challenges and increases public bone marrow awareness and facilitating donor registrations.

Methods: In addition to the option of online registration, where individuals can sign up as volunteer donors and have a kit sent to their home, the center also has a well-established network “Hubs” dedicated to promoting bone marrow donation. All the coordination is managed by CBMDP-Save a Life office in Patras. Hubs are categorized to “*Active Hubs*” and “*Information Stations*”. Active Hubs are comprised of well-trained and annually evaluated volunteers, who actively recruit and register bone marrow donors annually. Hubs may include individuals from various sectors, such as: Hospital Blood Units or other healthcare institutions, Non-governmental, Not-for-Profit Organizations, Educational Institutions and Companies. Their Key Responsibilities are to Organize or participate in local awareness campaigns and donor registration drives. Mobilize local organizations and associations to support bone marrow donation. Distribute informational materials about bone marrow donation. Promote CBMDP- Save a Life messages through local media channels. The Information Stations are served as stable- interactive points where individuals can obtain printed informational materials about bone marrow donation and the registration kit.

Results: During the first six years of the CBMDP- Save a Life program, an average of 40 events was held annually. In the subsequent nine years (excluding the two years impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic), an average of 250 events were organized per year, significantly driven by the contributions of our 50 Hubs throughout the country. This substantial increase in events enabled us to recruit approximately 6,000-7,000 donors annually in recent years enhancing HLA diversity since donors are geographically diverse (landscape and islands).

Conclusions: We conclude that our strategy to establish hubs all over the Greece enable us to cover and strengthen the Greek Registry steadily over time.