

MTF Soldiers register to donate bone marrow

By **DANA ELISE SMITH**
CSJFTC PUBLIC Affairs

Soldiers of Medical Task Force Shelby were given the opportunity to register for the National Bone Marrow Registry May 8.

According to the C.W. “Bill” Young Marrow Donor Center’s website (www.dodmarrow.org), an estimated 30,000 children and adults in the United States, more than 500 of them in the Department of Defense, are diagnosed each year with leukemia, aplastic anemia or other fatal blood diseases. For many of these people, only a bone marrow transplant can save their lives.

The DoD established the C. W. “Bill” Young Marrow Donor Center, located near Washington D.C., to meet the special needs of the military. Registration is free. All active duty military members and their family members, DoD civilian employees and contractors, Coast Guard and National Guard and Reserve personnel are eligible to register. They must be 18 to 60 years old and generally healthy.

There are many things that sets apart the DoD marrow program than other civilian recruiting programs. The DoD program matches not just people in need of bone marrow in the U.S., but 19 other countries. It also is responsible for 20 percent of stem cell donations. The program is funded by congress while other programs ask a fee or for a donation.

Eddy Medina is the senior recruiter for center.

“Our goal in recruiting at Medical Task Force Shelby and other places is to give everyone an opportunity to register,” he said. “The more people we can recruit the best chance of getting a donor match for a patient.”

He said that because bone marrow tissue types are unique to certain racial or ethnic groups, a patient’s best match would be with someone of his or her ethnic and racial group.

The recruiters of the program usually contact military medical units, like MTFs, so they can recruit more personnel for the registry.

“Normally when we do this, it’s the medical command that is involved,” said Medina. “We often get the labs involved because they understand the procedures of our programs stem cell and bone marrow.”

The registration process at MTFs only took a few minutes. Soldiers filled out a registration form and were given four oral swabs. The swabbing is painless and the swab samples will be tested to see if they are eligible to donate.

Sgt. Mai Thao, a member of 7212th Medical Support Unit, headquartered in Rochester, Minn., assigned to MTFs was among the group of Soldiers who took the opportunity to register.

“Registering was very easy. It was just swabbing. It didn’t hurt,” she said.

Thao said she knew about bone marrow donation but she never thought about doing it until the recruiters came to MTFs.

“No one asked me to do it before now, but I registered because of the thought that I could possibly save someone’s life,” she said.

Spc. Emily Deters also registered.

“I felt it couldn’t hurt to know if I was eligible to donate because there are people out there who really need it,” she said.

If the registry ever identifies the Soldiers as a preliminary match, they will be contacted for additional



Photo by Dana Elise Smith, CSJFTC Public Affairs
Above, Sgt. Mai Thao, a member of the 7212th Medical Support Unit, headquartered in Rochester, Minn., and serving in Medical Task Force Shelby takes an oral swab from the cheek of fellow MTFs Soldier, Sgt. Lacy Taylor for the bone marrow registry test. At right, Sgt. Wendy Surak opens wide for an oral swab for the bone marrow registry test.



blood testing. If this test indicates that they are the best match, they will receive information about the donation process and a thorough physical exam. After that, they will be able to decide if they want to go forward with the donation process.

Soldiers who missed the opportunity can go to a blood donor center, online at www.dodmarrow.org/, or call the C. W. “Bill” Young / DoD Marrow Donor Program at 1-800-MARROW-3 (627-7693).



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