

Police launch partnership with Blood Cancer charity



Police Scotland has launched a pioneering partnership with blood cancer charity Anthony Nolan which could help save the lives of hundreds of people with blood cancer.

For the first time in its history, Police Scotland will work in partnership with a charity to recruit police officers to the national stem cell donor register.

With hundreds of healthy young recruits joining the police force every year, this could result in lifesaving matches for blood cancer patients in Scotland and around the world.

As part of the ground-breaking collaboration, police recruits, known as probationers, are given the opportunity to hear a presentation during their time training at the Police Scotland College and will have the opportunity to join up as a potential donor for someone in need of a lifesaving transplant.

At the launch of the partnership on 4th October, probationers who choose to join the register will be asked to fill in a medical form and give a saliva sample. They will then be added to the register and notified if they are a match for someone in need of a stem cell transplant.

As many as 800 recruits can be trained in a year at the College based at Tulliallan Castle in Kincardine, Fife. They will be invited to a donor registration event at the college, which will also be open to serving officers who are visiting the college.

To register as a potential donor, people must be aged 16-30,

weigh at least 50kg and be in good health. The charity is particularly looking for more young men to join, as they are currently underrepresented on the register.

Police Constable Frazer McFadyen, 29, has first-hand experience of the lifesaving difference stem cell donors can make. Frazer joined the donor register in 2002, and helped set up a Marrow student group at Stirling University to organise donor recruitment and awareness-raising events for Anthony Nolan.

Ten years later, as he was completing initial police training, he was selected as a match for someone with blood cancer.

“The week that was scheduled for the transplant happened to be my passing-out parade from the Police College,” said Frazer. “I explained to everyone that the transplant was going on and they were really supportive and we made the timings work.

“Donating was easy, just like an extended blood donation. I had a visitor from Anthony Nolan who was really helpful, and the whole thing was an incredible experience.”

Knowing how important stem cell donation is, Frazer realised that his colleagues at Police Scotland could help tackle the shortage of donors.

“I learned a lot about Anthony Nolan and blood cancer through the experience of donating, and about the need for more donors.

“I realised that patients are dying because of a lack of young, fit people signing up to donate, and that’s who the police recruitment attract. It seemed like a perfect match.”

There have already been three pilot events to test the initiative with the previous intakes of probationers, which saw the majority of eligible people present join the register.

Frazer added, “It would be really great to see loads of police

officers, particularly young men, joining and helping to tackle the inequalities that exist on the donor register.

“It would be brilliant for people to see this as part of being a police officer.”

Laura Regan, 22, from Berwick-upon-Tweed, knows just how important it is to raise awareness of the Anthony Nolan register. Laura, who graduated from Aberdeen University this summer, had a stem cell transplant from an anonymous donor in November 2015 to treat her acute lymphoblastic leukaemia.

“Being told there was someone who was a match for me was amazing and it was incredible knowing that someone was there and willing to help,” said Laura.

“I’ve always wondered who it was. I would just thank them so much for doing that for me. The fact that someone is willing to go out of their way to help someone is incredible because it makes such a big difference – if it wasn’t for them I might not even be here.

“I think the partnership between Police Scotland and Anthony Nolan could make a big difference, especially as the police recruit young men of the right age group.

“I was lucky as I was able to find a match but a lot of people struggle.”

Superintendent Chris Stones, of the Training, Leadership and Development department at Police Scotland, said, “Helping people is at the heart of everything we do in Police Scotland. To be able to take this beyond what a Police Officer does on a daily basis is something we are hugely proud of.

“Our recruits have always spent time and energy on supporting charitable work while they undertake their training and the opportunity to support Anthony Nolan was one we embraced.

“Having met with the Anthony Nolan team and spoken to those

affected, my hope is that Police Scotland can make a difference to someone's life."

Henny Braund, chief executive of Anthony Nolan, said: "We are delighted to partner with Police Scotland and encourage more people on the force to register with Anthony Nolan. By joining the stem cell donor register, officers at Police Scotland have the potential to save the lives of people with blood cancer.

"This is an exciting opportunity to raise awareness of the stem cell donor register and make a massive difference to people with blood cancer in Scotland and beyond."

The partnership is especially timely as Anthony Nolan published a Scottish strategy last month, outlining new ways to engage supporters in Scotland and increase awareness of the need for more stem cell donors.

Currently around 10% of the potential donors on the Anthony Nolan register are from Scotland, and in 2015 Scottish supporters helped to raise almost £1million of vital funds. Anthony Nolan aims to recruit 10,000 Scottish donors a year by 2020.