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**THE POWER OF ONE TO SAVE A LIFE: BECOME A COMMITTED DONOR**

**28-year-old South Asian leukemia patient's goal is to register 50,000 committed donors**

**New York, NY**, July 16, 2007— Vinay Chakravarthy has two reasons to celebrate: His second wedding anniversary to his wife, Rashmi, and successful registration of over 17,000 South Asians into the National Marrow Donor Program® (NMDP). Vinay was diagnosed with life-threatening acute myelogenous leukemia (or AML) in November 2006. Vinay is playing two roles in his life; One as a patient viewing his condition as a human being and the other as a doctor viewing this condition from a scientific point of view. He is a resident in orthopedics at Boston Medical Center.

Made up of Vinay's friends and family across the country, Team Vinay encourages people to believe in "The Power of One" and to "Become a Committed Donor". Based on the successful turn-out at the donor drives over the past five weeks, Team Vinay has extended their search for Vinay and other patients until August 20<sup>th</sup> and they have raised their goal objectives from wanting to register 20,000 donors to registering 50,000.

A South Asian has a 1 in 20,000 probability of finding a matching donor compared to a Caucasian who has a 1 in 15 chance of finding one.

"In less than five weeks, we have registered over 16,000 new donors," said Vinay Chakravarthy, while attending his first donor drive in New York City. "We are making significant progress but more must be done. A few moments of your time can provide a lifetime of moments for patients like me. The 'Power of One' speaks to all of us."

Team Vinay enthusiastic and driven to make this campaign a success. They are using all forms of modern day communication in spreading the word by setting up the

[www.helpvinay.org](http://www.helpvinay.org) website, streamlining videos, running public service announcements with well known actors in the South Asian media, Circulating emails to register, posting [www.helpvinay.org](http://www.helpvinay.org) banners, blogging, directly marketing to South Asians across the nation, and airing messages from well wishers through the use of viral video on YouTube and [www.rapouts.com](http://www.rapouts.com). In the past one month, more than 250,000 people have viewed the video clips. Vinay also received a letter of support from Illinois Senator and Presidential hopeful, Barack Obama. There has been an outpouring of support from the Indian diaspora. International media, including Indian media, are following the story closely.

“Friends and family of Vinay are saving lives by raising awareness of the need for South Asians to join the Registry”, said Steve Lovelace, Director of Recruitment and Community Development of the National Marrow Donor Program. “They’ve done a commendable job by spreading awareness on local, national, and international levels.”

Yet registering new donors is not enough to solve the problem of South Asian under representation in the NMDP Registry. Donor retention is poor: Over 50% of registered South Asians are deemed "unavailable" when called on to donate. Being "unavailable" can include the inability to be located or to donate due to health restrictions. Experienced recruiters cite unwillingness to donate as a primary obstacle in the South Asian community.

Team Vinay is encouraging people to become committed donors. "Our community can no longer afford to deny each other the gift of life," said Vinay's wife, Rashmi, pleading to the 12 identified donors who have been deemed "unavailable" to donate to her husband.

"Most people do not realize when they are called to be a marrow or blood cell donor, they may be the only person who can save that patient's life. Team Vinay is on the ground ensuring that lack of education, fear of the unknown, and myths about donation are removed from the equation. We must reach out to the community and educate each other so no family suffers like we are suffering now," said Rashmi.

One oft-cited reason for the unwillingness to donate is a lack of education on the marrow donation procedure itself. "Most people do not realize that most of the time, donors do not need to stay in the hospital," stated Rafiya Peerbhoy Khan, President, South Asian Marrow Association of Recruiters (SAMAR) and expert in the field of human leukocyte antigens (known as HLA or genetic markers).

"There are two procedures to donate marrow/blood cells: the most commonly used procedure is similar to giving a blood donation wherein only the blood stem cells are taken and the blood is given back to the donor. Nothing is actually lost, and everything is gained. There cannot be an easier way of giving somebody a second chance at life. The other procedure is done under anesthesia where 3 – 5% marrow is removed with a needle and syringe, which is regenerated in a couple of weeks. No long term side effects have been reported" stated Khan.

On any given day, there are 6,000 patients searching the Registry for a match. Vinay returns to the hospital this week where he will undergo chemotherapy for one month prior to transplant. Vinay's campaign will run until August 20, 2007. For more information becoming a committed donor, please visit [www.helpvinay.org](http://www.helpvinay.org).

**About Vinay Chakravarthy:**

Vinay is a native of Fremont, California. He attended Ardenwood Elementary for grammar school and Walters Junior High and Kennedy High School. He completed his undergraduate degree at U.C. Berkeley and went on to obtain his Master's and Medical Degrees from Boston University. He is a resident in orthopedics at Boston Medical Center. He was married in 2005 to Rashmi, a medical student at Boston University.

**About Acute Myelogenous Leukemia (AML):**

According to the National Marrow Donor Program, acute myelogenous leukemia (AML) is a fast-growing cancer of the blood and bone marrow. In AML, the bone marrow makes many immature cells called blasts. Blasts normally develop into white blood cells that fight infection. However, the blasts are abnormal in AML. They do not develop and cannot fight infections. The bone marrow may also make abnormal red blood cells and platelets. The number of abnormal cells (leukemia cells) grows quickly. They crowd out the normal red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets the body needs.

**About Team Vinay: The Power of One to Save a Life: Become a Committed Donor**

This web site has been put together by Vinay's friends and family to save his life and raise awareness for the need for South Asian representation in the National Marrow Donor Program. Since Vinay's relapse and web site posting, the South Asian community has come together on a grass roots, local, national, and international levels, gathering powerful momentum to support this cause. Since it was started, the community has held over 283 bone marrow drives in over 20 states across the country, and has many more drives planned in the next 4 weeks. They have registered more than 17,000 people to become donors. Please visit [www.helpvinay.org](http://www.helpvinay.org) for more information.

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