

# Emergency Measures

## 'ER' star promotes bone marrow donation registry

Published in print and on the web at: [www.tulsaworld.com](http://www.tulsaworld.com) on May 4, 2006 by Rita Sherrow, World Television Editor  
[www.tulsaworld.com/entertainment/article.aspx?articleID=060504](http://www.tulsaworld.com/entertainment/article.aspx?articleID=060504) Te D1 Emerg31956



### A quick swab taken inside a person's cheek can save a life.

That swab can be a link between people who are dying and those who want to help. It is this simple test and the crucial need for it that prompted television actress Laura Innes, from NBC's long-running drama "ER," to step away from the cameras to become an advocate for the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP).

Innes, who has portrayed Dr. Kerry Weaver on "ER" for 11 years, is urging Americans -- especially minorities -- to register for the program during the fourth annual "Thanks Mom! Marrow Donor Drive" scheduled nationwide on Mother's Day weekend, May 12-14, 2006.

(\*Check the NMDP web site to see dates for this annual event: [www.marrows.org](http://www.marrows.org).)

The aim is to get adults, ages 18 to 60, to become part of a program that provides lifesaving bone marrow transplants. It's a project that has a special significance for Innes because of her daughter.

She and her husband, actor/writer David Brisbin, adopted Mia, a 1-year-old girl from China. As the mother of a Chinese child, she became involved with the organization Families With Children From China (FCC). Through that group, she met a Wisconsin couple looking for a marrow donor for their 9-year-old adopted daughter.

Four years ago, Kailee Wells was diagnosed with aplastic anemia, a disease that causes patients to stop generating enough healthy blood cells. Kailee's doctors began searching for a donor who could provide healthy bone marrow, capable of producing healthy blood cells. According to the Aplastic Anemia and MDS International Foundation web site, in patients younger than 30 years old who have a matched sibling donor, transplantation offers an 80% recovery rate. But a child adopted from overseas has no genetic link with his or her adoptive parents or adoptive siblings. The National Marrow Donor Program, a national registry of potential donors, became Kailee's only hope.

"When she was diagnosed, her parents found that there was a dearth of minorities who were part of the bone marrow registry," said Innes, mother of Cal, 15, and Mia, 4 1/2. "Her dad is an incredibly proactive guy, and he has organized this whole drive and has a Web site -- [www.kaileewells.com](http://www.kaileewells.com) -- that tells her whole story." Kailee's parents spent years looking for a donor before a match was found. But that first transplant was not successful, Innes said. A second successful match was found -- a doctor from China, who traveled to Wisconsin for the transplant procedure.

"She is doing great now," said Innes, who will appear as a guest on ABC's "The View" next week to promote the registry. But Kailee's plight pointed out a problem with the registry -- only 25 percent of those registered are from minority groups and only 6 percent are Asian. According to the NMDP, there is an urgent need for donors who are black, American Indian or an Alaska native, Asian, Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander and Hispanic or Latino. Innes said she is grateful that her child is healthy.

"But the reality is that only 30 percent of people find a match within their family. Some 70 percent of people diagnosed with various illnesses (that require a bone marrow transplant) have to go through the registry," Innes said. "It's very important for everybody to get tested and registered," she said. "People also aren't aware how very easy it is to get on the registry."

Technicians take a swab from inside the cheek of each person, said Sundae Smith, donor center search specialist for the NMDP in Tulsa, adding that the swab "takes a matter of seconds. Filling out the release form takes 5 to 10 minutes." The swab sample is classified by cell type and is added to the registry. To find out how to join the registry, people can call a local hospital or log onto [www.marrows.org](http://www.marrows.org) for information on how to participate.

"For me, it was something that raised my consciousness," Innes said. "Obviously I feel a connection with the Wells family. But beyond that, it was never really something I thought about before. It's not something you do as a habit the way people give blood or list themselves as an organ donor on their driver's license. "It occurred to me that all you are doing is a very simple procedure, giving a little blood or getting a swab inside your mouth, to get on the registry," Innes said. "If you actually match, then you can save somebody's life. You have given a mother her child's life. "When I stopped and thought about that concept, I realized it actually is an awesome thing, in the real sense of the word."

**\*Join the Marrow Registry for FREE at: [www.dkmsamericas.org](http://www.dkmsamericas.org).  
Register online & receive the cheek swab testing kit in the mail.**