

Heart of a Tiger: Giving the gift of life

I am constantly reminded of the compassion and spirit of generosity of our Fort Hays State University students. I love hearing the stories of how they are impacting the lives of others every day. Emily Schulte, Hays, is one of those stories. As she sets her sights on a path to medical school after her FHSU graduation, Emily put herself on the patient side of the bone marrow donation process in January.

Emily is soft-spoken and known for her humble nature. As a biology major and student employee of FHSU's Health and Wellness Services, Emily made the decision as a freshman to become a bone marrow donor when she worked at a Be the Match bone marrow drive on the FHSU campus.

During the drive, a DNA sample was swabbed from Emily's cheek, sent to Be the Match, and then added to a national registry list. After waiting three years, Emily was notified last fall that she was a potential match for someone in need of a transplant.

"A large part of what motivated me was to be able to say that I gave someone the gift of life," Emily said. "Also, to understand the donor process and know what donors go through."

"For me, I didn't have any doubts about doing it. I got called (from Be the Match) and knew that whatever I had to do, I was going to do it."

Be the Match flew Emily and her mother to Chicago in January, where her bone marrow donation, which she described as similar to a lengthy blood donation, took about 4 ½ hours. Prior to the donation, filgrastim injections were performed to stimulate stem cell production, enabling Emily's donation to have an above-average stem cell quantity.

As a student preparing for a medical career, Emily did some of the preparation work for the donation on her own. Her coworkers at FHSU's Health and Wellness Services assisted her in the process.

"I definitely also had a really good support system, from both my coworkers and Be the Match during the preparation process," Emily said.

Be the Match funded the flight, transportation, meals, and lodging for her and her mother during the trip. From their flight to Chicago to their flight back to Hays, the trip took the pair three days. The whirlwind travel and donation process were physically exhausting for Emily.

"Honestly, I felt like I got hit by a bus. But within two to three days after the donation, I felt pretty much back to normal," she said. "They (the medical staff) want you to hydrate and rest and take care of yourself. I didn't have any bad side effects after or before."

Emily received a text saying her donation had been sent to the patient's hospital within a day of her donation. She will be allowed to contact the recipient anonymously if she chooses. After a year, though, she and the recipient can exchange contact information. She hopes to meet the recipient with whom she shares this special connection.

Emily inspires those around her to consider donating bone marrow or contributing to an organization that provides that service.

“I would tell them that despite any doubts you might have, go through with it,” she said. “It is a really unique opportunity. The best gift you can give someone is a second chance at life.”

This is exactly why Fort Hays State is such a special place. Our students who are willing to step out of their comfort zones to ensure a future for others give me tremendous hope for the future. Thank you to Emily and all those who choose to make second chances possible.