



The Sunflower Fund
Hope begins with you

MEDIA RELEASE

THE SUNFLOWER FUND LAUDED BY PEERS FOR USE OF ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY TO OPTIMISE DONOR/RECIPIENT HLA MATCHING

Cape Town – August 2018. The Sunflower Fund, a donor recruitment centre and registry in Cape Town has partnered with the Centre for Proteomic and Genomic Research (CPGR) to HLA test potential blood stem cell donors using the most advanced technology in HLA testing known as Next Generation Sequencing (NGS).

This new level of testing will be performed using the AllType™ NGS Assay, developed by Thermo Fisher Scientific's One Lambda brand. It was implemented in January of 2018 with the support of Thermo Fisher's South African distributor for One Lambda, Lagitre International srl. This new strategy will improve the process of accurately matching potential donors with blood stem cell recipients. The move to NGS has been met with high praise by peers from around the world.

A blood stem cell transplant is considered to be a curative therapy for leukemia and other blood diseases. Despite the fact that there are millions of potential blood stem cell donors registered worldwide, finding a donor whose HLA profile matches a patient's profile is challenging. HLA profiles may differ by typing resolution, typing methods applied, and the number of loci typed. HLA Typing by NGS will help minimize many of these challenges.

The Sunflower Fund is a non-profit organisation that fights blood diseases like Leukaemia through the recruitment of stem cell donors and maintaining a registry of potential donors committed to helping anyone in need of a life-saving stem cell transplant. We fundraise to cover the cost of education and awareness about the need for and the process to become a blood stem cell donor as well as to cover the cost of the HLA tissue-typing test involved in the recruitment of donors.

With a 17-year track record of recruiting donors in South Africa, The Sunflower Fund has over the years kept abreast of these challenges by improving the level of HLA typing of donors in accordance with international standard and as technology becomes available.

"We implemented the AllType™ NGS Assay, an 11-Loci high resolution solution to ensure we test at the highest level possible to improve search and match optimization," said Alana James CEO of The Sunflower Fund. "What this means is, less confirmatory tests are needed when a match is identified and this in turn means less cost and a reduced waiting period for the patient," James continued.

The Sunflower Fund is the only registry globally to test at this level so it is not just a first for Africa, but a first for the world.

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“The strong partnership between the Sunflower Fund, CPGR and Lagitre International, srl lead to the implementation of this new technology which in the end will impact the lives of transplant patients globally, and is one of the reasons why Thermo Fisher’s transplant diagnostics business continues to provide transplant centers worldwide with the most advanced solutions in transplantation. Furthermore, The Sunflower Fund’s Stem Cell Registry is leading the implementation of the 11 Loci testing solution in South Africa and we are proud to be part of this journey.” says Gianfranco Gianella, Managing Director Lagitre International srl.

The African diaspora is one of the under-represented groups in the world-wide stem cell donor pool. Consequently patients of African ancestry in need of stem cell transplantation have struggled to find donors.

The Stem Cell Registry Alliance (SCRA) was formulated in 2017 to drive the agenda of recruiting donors of African descent to assist patients around the world and particularly in Africa who are in need of a blood stem cell transplant from an unrelated matched donor. The SCRA comprises registries from the Caribbean, UK and Africa that jointly aim to recruit 100 000 donors of African descent by 2030.

“There are many patients around the world that are of African ancestry and the fact that a registry exists in Africa that will recruit donors and type them at the highest level means these patients have an increased chance of finding their life-saving match,” says Arthur Dunk from the Caribbean Bone Marrow Registry a member of the SCRA.

“Our vision is to save lives of individuals diagnosed with blood diseases by increasing the number of patients making it to transplant,” added James. “With patients at the forefront of our focus, we are excited about the hope that technology provides in refining our efforts,” James concluded.

About The Sunflower Fund:

The Sunflower Fund is a donor recruitment centre and stem cell registry that is part of a global network, dedicated to creating awareness about blood diseases and stem cell donation, recruiting blood stem cell donors and maintaining a registry of committed donors.

The Sunflower Fund pays for the cost of the tissue-type testing. This is fundamental to saving the lives of South Africans who need a stem cell transplant. The chance of finding a matching donor is 1 in 100,000 – and as ethnic origin plays a significant role in the search for a donor, South Africa’s rainbow nation is at a distinct disadvantage, requiring a large pool of prospective donors.

Should you wish to become a donor, support one of the fundraising projects or make a financial contribution, please contact The Sunflower Fund on toll-free number: 0800 12 10 82. Visit www.sunflowerfund.org.za to learn more or look out for the DONATE button to make a cash donation via the website.