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US prof has 7 weeks to get bone marrow donor

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MUMBAI: Seven weeks. That's all the time Nalini Ambady, an Indian professor at Stanford, has to find a bone marrow donor match to treat a remission of her leukaemia. A social media campaign and all-out efforts to find a donor, most likely to be of South Asian origin, have touched India, where donor drives are now being planned in different cities.

South Asians are underrepresented in the marrow donor registries making it difficult to find a marrow match — estimates put the odds of finding a match at one in 10,000 to 20,000.

As the clock ticks down, supporters of Nalini Needs You cam-

MEDIA BLITZ

Nalini Ambady, a pioneering social psychologist who grew up in Kerala, was first diagnosed in 2004 with leukaemia, which was found to have returned last year.



The social media campaign (<http://nalineedsyou.com/>) for a donor for Ambady has touched Facebook and youtube, and includes a video and an appeal from writer Malcolm Gladwell: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bj1aL8h3V3g&feature=youtu.be>

Those who wish to help out can also check <http://datrworld.org/> to find out how to organise a drive

paign have launched an avalanche of approaches — including through YouTube and Facebook — to intensify efforts to find a match. “Every day, we have had inquiries from people in India who are willing to hold bone marrow donation registration drives,” said Aneeta Rattan, a postdoctoral research

scholar at Stanford University, by email.

Drives are being planned in the coming weeks in partnership with DATRI, one of the main Indian registries, in Kerala, Bangalore and Chennai. Testing is easy, and entails providing a cheek swab, to identify the

Human Leukocyte Antigen — proteins found in body tissues — which is matched to the patient. If the match is successful, the donor undergoes a procedure similar to platelet donation.

“The closer you are to the genetic origin of the patient, better is the probability of finding a

match,” said Gayathri Venugopalan, who coordinates drives for DATRI, a non-profit. She estimated that, Indians registered across registries in the country would be around 50,000 — ‘dismal figure’ — attributable both to cost issues, lack of awareness and novelty of the concept.

The Facebook page has more than 60,000 Indian members. “We believe that social media is very powerful,” said Jon Freeman, a former student of Ambady’s and professor at Dartmouth College. “We have the precedent of the Amit Gupta campaign.”

Last year, Gupta, a Silicon Valley entrepreneur, successfully found a marrow match after launching a social media campaign.

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