

## County is focus in dad's global search for bone marrow donor

Published Date: 20 July 2007

### High percentage of population in Beds carry gene needed for suitable transplant.

A father-of-two who has already beaten cancer once is searching the globe for a bone marrow donor to help treat his rare form of leukaemia.

Graham Barnell, 42, now lives in Melbourne, Australia, but is looking to Bedfordshire, and his home town of Kempston where his adoptive parents still live, to help fight his cancer.



Graham Barnell with his wife Samantha and children Poppy and Jack

Graham was first diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia in April and had two cycles of chemotherapy to fight the disease into remission.

Unfortunately he has an extremely unusual type of the disease that puts him into the adverse prognosis group. These patients run a very high risk of relapse, but the family are feeling lucky as Graham was diagnosed very early on and is a good candidate for a bone marrow transplant.

Bedfordshire in particular could provide a donor for Graham as doctors are having trouble finding a match for one specific gene. But a sample of the county's population taken in 2002 showed the gene showed up in 25 per cent of people here, higher than anywhere else on the planet.

His wife Samantha, 37, said: "He has recovered well from the two courses of chemotherapy and our spirits are quite high at the moment, but it is worrying to know that the disease could relapse at any time.

"The results of a transplant are much better if it is given in the first remission and we just don't know how long that window will be available to us."

Graham grew up in Kempston, went to Hastingsbury Upper School, and worked at WH Allen engineering works in Queens Park.

He moved to Australia with Samantha in 2003 to be closer to her family, and they have two children, Jack, aged six, and Poppy, two.

Graham was first diagnosed with leukaemia after he started having heart palpitations while on holiday in Victoria, Australia. His doctor took a blood test and referred him to a cardiologist.

Samantha added: "If Graham hadn't been diagnosed when he was, he would have had only four-to six weeks to live. His GP rang me at work to say that he had leukaemia and I

had to go and get him from work and take him straight to the hospital where a bed was ready for him to start chemotherapy.

"It was a shock to say the least. When I got to his work he was waiting outside, he got into the car and we both burst into tears."

Patients with an adverse form leukaemia have a 78 per cent chance of relapse, and only 15 per cent survive for more than five years.

Graham has no full siblings so the family are looking to the UK to find a donor as the register in Australia is small in comparison.

Being a donor is now much easier than it used to be with no actual operation needed, as the bone marrow can be collected from a simple blood donation.

If a match is found an Australian Red Cross team will fly to the UK to collect the stem cells.

The family are now urging people to sign up to the donor register and give blood to help people in similar situations. More information can be found about Graham's progress and the disease at

[www.adonorforgraham.com](http://www.adonorforgraham.com) .