

Hope, chemo - & match

Ailing mom keeps faith bone-marrow donor will be found

BY MIKE JACCARINO

JENNIFER JONES Austin is still clinging to life — and hope.

The Brooklyn mother suffering from leukemia is hanging on to the possibility that someone out there — somewhere — is a match for a bone-marrow transplant.

"I wake up a lot at different hours of the night and sometimes, I have a hard time sleeping, just worrying about tomorrow and what's to come," Austin, 41, told DW Bronx Boro News.

"I pray a lot and try to think positive about what can be, and hope and pray for a good outcome for myself and for others. I look at it where everyone has their burdens and this is mine. I just pray that I get through it."

The Bronx organization BronxWorks recently held a testing drive to locate a match. But only 75 people showed up — and none proved to have the rare genetic combination that can save Jones' life.

Dozens of similar testing drives are conducted throughout the country — as far away as Detroit and Richmond — to find matches not only for Austin, but others facing the same plight.

Of the 8 million people on the Be the Match Marrow Registry, only 500,000 are African-American.

A list of testing sights and times may be found at the Web site www.savejenaustin.com.

"The drives being done here and across the country give me joy," said Austin, who has two children, ages 12 and 7.

"Just seeing other people come together and giving their time and giving physically — it gives me a lot of joy and it gives me the sense that I have a greater purpose."

Austin, who worked as a senior vice president with The United Way of New York City, was diagnosed with the terrible illness four months ago.

Since then, she has been receiving

chemotherapy to buy time until a donor can be found.

"It's one of those races against the clock," she said. "The cancer can return. It is likely to return. So the chemotherapy is intended to keep me in remission while we search for a donor."

The brutal, six-day, once-monthly treatments require her to be hospitalized. She was on a ventilator as recently as September.

A test of Austin's relatives came up negative for a match for a bone-marrow donation.

The test to identify a suitable donor involves a simple and painless oral swab that is analyzed at a lab. Those who turn out to be a match will be contacted by mail.

Donating bone marrow is relatively painless, akin to donating blood or a minor surgical procedure.

"Hopefully, I'll get a match and everything will work out and I'll be able to continue living, and living out my life purpose, which is doing for others," said Austin.

"That's what I hold on to."

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Jennifer Jones Austin prays for a bone-marrow match.