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The Lifesaving Times

Stories that show what a difference you make anthonynolan.org

Marrow recruits 200,000th potential lifesaver

This year, our Marrow university programme celebrated recruiting their 200,000th potential stem cell donor to our register!

Since its launch in 1998 at the University of Nottingham, the Marrow network spans almost 50 universities across the UK. Their goal is to bring visibility to Anthony Nolan's work and to encourage fellow students to save lives by joining the stem cell register.

This university activity is critical to the long-term sustainability of the stem cell donor register, as research shows younger people offer the best outcomes for patients receiving a stem cell transplant, resulting in fewer complications, quicker physical recovery and improved survival rates.

The university programme collectively drives over 25% of all donor registrations for Anthony Nolan, and one in 100 of those recruited via Marrow also go on to donate their stem cells to someone in need. They truly are recruiting lifesavers.

Our Marrow groups at universities in Warwick, Southampton, York, Liverpool, Brighton and Sussex, Glasgow and East London have all been working incredibly hard to grow our donor register and reach the next milestone – and at 2pm on Thursday 12 March the 200,000th potential lifesaver signed up at the University of Southampton!

Bailey Deacon (second from left), president of Southampton Marrow

Bailey Deacon, president of Southampton Marrow, describes the motivations of the volunteers: "We are a group of full-time students running all of this in our spare time – fundraising, donor recruitment, awareness events – because we know how much it matters. Every person who stops at our stall and signs up could be the match that someone desperately needs."

Talia Adams, university manager at Anthony Nolan, was full of praise: "Marrow is a remarkable example of what young people can achieve when they channel their energy into something that truly matters."

Abi Foulerton, who volunteers as part of the Leeds Marrow group, joined because she wanted to make a direct impact on patients' lives.

"Recruiting 200k potential lifesavers shows there is real hope for patients and highlights the powerful impact that student volunteering can have."

September marks the start of the new academic year, with the Marrow network looking to build on this success. Thank you for your support – along with our Marrow volunteers, it helps recruit as many potential lifesavers to the register as possible.

‘The hardest part was having to tell my sons’: Michelle’s story

In 2024, I was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia (AML) the day after my 57th birthday.

One week earlier I felt completely fine, but then I suddenly became extremely fatigued. I couldn’t walk upstairs without my heart racing or even move around the house without feeling breathless. I ended up in A&E, and within hours, my whole world turned upside down. Being told I had leukaemia was terrifying – but the hardest part was having to tell my sons.

It took seven months of chemotherapy and hospital isolation before I finally heard the words I’d been desperate to hear: no leukaemia was detectable in my bone marrow. I was over the moon – but the joy was short-lived. Because of how aggressive and high risk my disease was, I was told it would come back quickly and that my only real chance of surviving would be to have a stem cell transplant. Without one, I was unlikely to live more than six months.

In November, we thought we’d found a match and I was due to go in for transplant in early December. But just days before, that donor fell through. I was devastated. After everything I’d been through, it felt like the rug had been pulled from under me again and I began to lose hope. Thankfully, a few weeks later, another donor was found. I was able to spend Christmas at home with my family, which meant the world to me after so much time apart. Then I was admitted to Southampton Hospital to begin the conditioning chemo ahead of transplant. I was terrified, but the NHS staff were incredible – every single person who came into my room helped me feel safe.

The transplant itself happened in February 2025. It was a surreal but peaceful experience. Then came the wait for the stem cells to engraft and little by little, I began to feel better. In April 2025, nearly a full year on from diagnosis, I was discharged home, just in time to celebrate my 58th birthday with my family.

It felt like I’d come full circle. Since then, I’ve been on a mission to make my second chance at life count. I created a bucket list journal called One Brave Life, with all royalties going to Anthony Nolan, and in September I decided to set myself a challenge – as part of Anthony Nolan’s Lifesaver Walk – to push myself even further.

Michelle enjoying life after her stem cell transplant

Michelle’s friends supported her Lifesaver Walk

Michelle’s Lifesaver Walk

To mark World Marrow Donor Day last year, I decided to climb seven of Hampshire’s most iconic hills in seven days to celebrate seven months of life since my stem cell transplant. This felt like the perfect way to celebrate survival, honour my donor, and raise awareness for those still waiting.

I was joined throughout the week by a group of incredible friends and family, who supported me every step of the way. Every hill felt like a shared victory.

This challenge wasn’t just about me. It was about celebrating the lives saved every year through stem cell transplants, giving hope to those still waiting for their perfect match, and remembering those who sadly never found theirs. I raised over £1,000 for Anthony Nolan and shared my story in the press – I’m so passionate about raising awareness of the stem cell register. You never know who you might be able to save.

Every step I took was a thank you to my donor. I’m so grateful for the second chance at life that I’ve been given, and I know I owe that to my incredible donor – a stranger who signed up to the register and said yes when they got the call. Their selfless decision saved my life.

Happy 30th birthday, ANRI!

In the financial year 25/26, we spent £3.17 million on research projects. This was primarily through the work of the Anthony Nolan Research Institute, celebrating its 30th birthday this year.

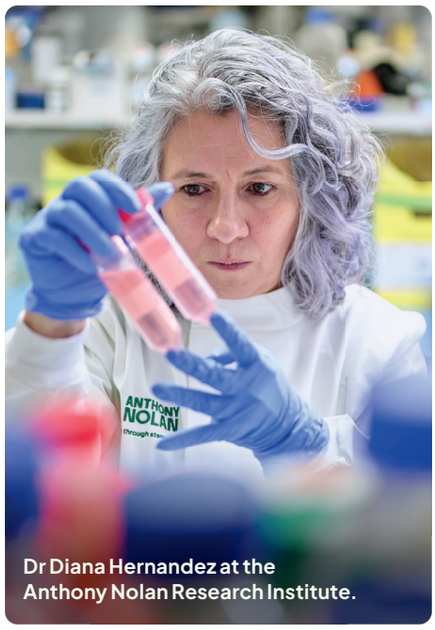
Our Institute opened in London in 1996 to help transform the lives of patients in need of a stem cell transplant or cellular therapy. It's home to some of the world's leading stem cell experts, who work tirelessly to improve all aspects of patient and stem cell donor care – from optimising the donor experience, to finding the best match for every patient, and investigating new approaches to help make transplant outcomes more equitable for all.

Over the years, Anthony Nolan's research has contributed to global understanding of transplants and changed clinical practice to help more patients survive and thrive. We were the first register in the world to lower the recruitment age to 16, after our research helped confirm young donors lead to better outcomes for patients. We demonstrated the importance of a sixth HLA gene, which is now used for donor matching by transplant centres across the world. And we opened the UK's first ever dedicated cord blood bank and research facility to provide more options for patients without a full match.

Our impact is far reaching. Beyond stem cell transplant, tools developed by our researchers play an essential role in solid organ transplant and immune system research across the globe. We are funders of the Accelerating Clinical Trials project, a pioneering new model for blood cancer and transplant clinical research. And our work is helping to develop the treatments of the future.

But we aren't stopping here. Despite progress, currently only fifty percent of adult patients survive for more than five years after a stem cell transplant. And people's experiences and chance of a positive outcome from treatment are not equal, but can depend on factors like their ethnicity, location, age and more. Every day, we are pushing the boundaries with our research work to help improve the future for all patients and donors.

The Donor Communications project, for example, has been designed to review how we communicate with our donors as they go through the stem cell donation process, ensuring we can provide the best possible care for these incredible lifesavers who are at the heart of what we do. Plus, we're investigating the use of a type of immunotherapy using umbilical cord-derived natural killer cells (NK cells) to treat cancer relapse. In cancer patients these cells are no longer able to perform the function correctly, but we can reinstate them by infusing third party (from a donor) NK cells grown in the lab. This helps to reduce the chance of relapse in patients and thus could lead to better post-transplant outcomes.



Dr Diana Hernandez at the Anthony Nolan Research Institute.

Celebrating three decades of our research institute has given us a chance to reflect on how far we have come, but we couldn't do any of this without you. There is still a way to go, so here's to the next 30 years of research at ANRI, with you by our side all the way.

Leave your own lifesaving legacy

Our research work aims to influence transplant outcomes for many years to come. By leaving a gift in your Will, you could have the same long-term impact. Join Angela, who has pledged to leave a gift in her Will to Anthony Nolan, and help us keep saving and transforming lives for generations to come.

"I had a stem cell transplant in 2024, and I have Anthony Nolan and my donor to thank for my life. I have included a gift in my Will to Anthony Nolan as I can't thank you enough for everything you do."

We'll even help you make the commitment for free with our free Will-writing offer. It can all be done quickly and easily, online and with no cost.

During the process you'll be given the option to pledge a gift to Anthony Nolan – there is no obligation at all, but if you did choose to, we'd be very grateful.

For more information visit **anthonynolan.org/legacy** or email **legacies@anthonynolan.org**

‘It was the weirdest feeling – like we’d known each other all our lives’: Ian’s story

Ian was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia (AML), and the disease was so aggressive that he was told a stem cell transplant would be his best chance of survival. After five rounds of chemotherapy, he had his lifesaving transplant in 2020.

Recovery was tough, but Ian got through the process with the support of his wife and family – and then his thoughts turned to the person who saved his life. After exchanging messages, they arranged to meet earlier this year – and coincidentally, it was on World Leukaemia Day!

“Nothing prepared me for the moment that I was able to say thank you to her face to face. I can’t tell you how powerful an emotion it was to finally meet Rachel and be able to thank her for saving not only my life but the lives of my wife and children who now can have a father when they thought they might not.

“I was terrified of the thought that Rachel would meet us and somehow not connect with me and be disappointed for all the effort that she went through to donate.

Ian meeting Rachel, his stem cell donor, for the first time

But it was the weirdest feeling – like we’d known each other all our lives.

“It’s testament to Rachel’s generosity of spirit and incredible kindness that I’m here writing these words, and that I can tell my wife I love her and hug my grown-up children.

“I hope hers and my family become closer through the experience. We owe her so much it’s hard to quantify. There’s no greater demonstration of humanity than giving someone part of you to save them. And she happens to be a legend, which is a bonus, I guess.

“I owe both Anthony Nolan and my incredible donor Rachel my life. I’ll never be able to thank them enough so instead I’m putting my energy into spreading the message far and wide – sign up and save a life like mine.”

Date for your diary

It may seem early to be thinking about Christmas – but we’ve got our annual carol concert lined up for **26 November 2026**! It will be hosted at St James Church in Piccadilly and tickets are available now (mince pie and glass of champagne included) at the link below:

anthonynolan.org/carolconcert

None of the lives saved in the stories you’ve read about, or the research carried out that could change the future, are possible without the generosity of people like you.

Every pound donated to us genuinely has a huge impact for patients.

ANTHONY NOLAN