Celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Bone Marrow Transplant Picnic

A fun and inspiring day for past recipients, their friends and families, and HHS staff.

Despite the threat of rain, approximately 300 people attended the 30th anniversary of the Bone Marrow Transplant Picnic on June 11, at the Dundas Driving Park. The event is attended by patients, families, friends and staff members.

Hamilton Health Sciences’ Bone Marrow Transplant Program has always been a visionary program. Under the leadership of then-director Dr. Michael Brain, the first related allogeneic bone marrow transplant (a transplant from a related family member – usually a sibling) took place in 1981. Bill Peckham, who received his related bone marrow transplant in January 1982, attended this year’s picnic with his family.

After successfully offering related donor transplants, the hospital set its sights on a new type of transplant. Many individuals do not find a suitable match within their family and, in these cases, an unrelated donor search is undertaken. Duncan Bull, a family physician in Erin, Ontario,
received the first successful unrelated bone marrow transplant in Canada, performed at Hamilton Health Sciences in February 1988. Duncan also attended this year’s event.

In June 2000, Hamilton Health Sciences’ Transplant Program began offering a new procedure called the non-myeloablative or “mini” transplant, allowing patients over the age of 55 to undergo this life-saving treatment. The first surviving recipient, Elizabeth Schade, also enjoyed the festivities of the day.

And now a new procedure called a Haploidentical Transplant is the most recent advancement available to patients who are unable to find the appropriate match in any of the 20 existing unrelated donor registries in the world. Dr. Irwin Walker, currently the director of HHS’ Bone Marrow Transplant Program, is the chief investigator for a multi-centre trial studying the procedure. Two recent recipients of this procedure, Anthony Moccio and Cheryl Thornton were both able to attend this year’s picnic and said how encouraging it was to see so many survivors and to participate in the event.

The picnic is a yearly reminder of the success that the Allogeneic Bone Marrow Transplant Program has had in curing those diagnosed with leukemia or lymphoma. At this year’s event, catered by the Copetown Lion’s Club, two transplant recipients spoke of their experience, inspiring other recipients and staff.

“This year the event was a huge success!” said Corinna McCracken, a social worker from the Bone Marrow Transplant Program. “We had fun listening to the Celtic rock sound of the Fiddlestix, and we all enjoyed the beautiful release of the live butterflies. The motto for the program is: ‘A New Marrow, A New Life’ and the picnic is a reminder of this.”