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## Give blood, provide stem cells

Mayor kicks off Blood Donor Week in honour of his older brother

By PATRICIA BROOKS ARENBURG Staff Reporter

The beds around him were full and there was already a lineup at the pancake breakfast as Mayor Peter Kelly rolled up his sleeve at a Halifax blood donor clinic.

"I've learned over the years the importance of blood products, platelets, plasma and stem cells, and I'm glad I can help, with others, to share what I have to offer," Mr. Kelly said.

The mayor gave his blood at the Gottingen Street offices of the Canadian Blood Services on Friday morning as part of a National Blood Donor Week clinic he hosted in honour of his older brother.

In April, Mr. Kelly donated stem cells from his blood, called peripheral blood stem cells, to his brother Ken to help him fight leukemia. Stem cell recipients need a large quantity of blood before and after the procedure, Canadian Blood Services says.

Mr. Kelly lost his mother to leukemia 12 years ago, and his sister died of cancer the year before. His father, Mort, is a cancer survivor.

"It's important that people know what it means to get these blood products," Mr. Kelly said. "Without it, people sometimes just don't survive."

Sue Smith, executive director of the OneMatch stem-cell and marrow network, said the mayor's public profile has helped.

"The most important thing is it just raises awareness . . . first of all of the need, and how easy it is to help someone out," she said.

An estimated 500 Canadians per year need the help of the Canadian Blood Services to find a stem-cell match, Ms. Smith said. But the service must import blood products for about 75 per cent of those, who cannot find a match within their own family. About 85 per cent of donors on the network's registry are Caucasian, she said, and there is a great need for donors of varying ethnic backgrounds.

Earlier this year, the Canadian Blood Services' OneMatch network began registering possible stem-cell donors online. Network staff contact potential donors by phone and send them a buccal swab — described as a long Q-tip "just like on CSI," Ms. Smith said — to obtain a sample for matching.

"It's now allowed us access to everybody in Canada because we can mail this out to remote places," she said.

Mr. Kelly remains on the stem-cell donor registry and said he would take the opportunity to help again.

"If others need my match, I'll be there to do it."

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