

# Addressing barriers to treatment through research and partnership

Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and the NMDP/Be The Match

Patients face many barriers that can impede access to cellular therapy. Working together with our transplant center partners to conduct research and implement innovative programs, the National Marrow Donor Program® (NMDP)/Be The Match® helps clear pathways for more patients to receive cellular therapy and improve patient outcomes.

The partnership between the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute Stem Cell Transplant and Cell Therapy Program and the NMDP/Be The Match is one example of how collaboration can improve practice from before patient referral through post-transplant care.

Dana-Farber and the NMDP/Be The Match have worked collaboratively to:

- Leverage research and establish ongoing partnerships with community oncologists for pre- and post-transplant care
- Expand the suite of services that make it easier for patients to navigate their care across the continuum
- Improve patient access to care by removing logistical and financial barriers

## Leveraging research to change the model of care

Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and the NMDP/Be The Match have long histories of leading research that drives practice change and improves patient outcomes. The organizations are currently leading research that is assessing the effectiveness of extending post-HCT care to the community oncology setting with the hope of accelerating patient access to treatment and improving quality of life post-treatment.

## Shared Care research brings post-transplant care closer to patients' homes

Researchers at Dana-Farber are taking a scientific approach to improving patient access to post-transplant care. They are enrolling patients in a randomized clinical trial that compares a Shared Care model (in which clinic and laboratory visits are shared between a patient's local oncologist and the primary HCT team at Dana-Farber) to usual care (all post-HCT appointments occurring at Dana-Farber). This work is funded through a contract with the [Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute](#).

This model aims to reduce the post-HCT travel and financial burden for patients and their caregivers, improve quality of life, and enable community physicians to stay connected to their patients. Dana-Farber works with a network of eight Shared Care community oncology practices throughout New England who are taking part in the study.

The Dana-Farber clinical study assesses patients’:

- 100-day non-relapse mortality and other health outcomes
- Transplant-related quality of life
- Financial hardship

Patients enrolled in the Shared Care study arm alternate between Dana-Farber and their community oncology clinic for post-HCT visits after returning home. The Dana-Farber team and Shared Care teams stay in regular communication.

The study is still underway, and research results are pending. Enrollment is on track to complete by the end of 2021 with analysis in 2022.

### **HLA Today program extends shared care model to pre-transplant care**

While the Shared Care study focuses on post-transplant care, the HLA Today program from the NMDP/Be The Match extends Dana-Farber’s collaboration with local hematologists and oncologists to support patients before referral for consultation at the transplant center.

HLA Today was inspired by research that showed rapid donor identification for patients with high-risk acute myeloid leukemia improved survival in first remission.<sup>1</sup>

HLA Today provides patient and family member HLA typing at no cost at the time of diagnosis so the process for finding a related or unrelated donor can begin as early as possible. The program also helps encourage collaboration and communication between local providers and transplant centers, so referrals for transplant consultation happen earlier.

In 2019, Dana-Farber partnered with the NMDP/Be The Match to encourage community oncologists who refer to Dana-Farber to implement the HLA Today program into their practices.

Dana-Farber began its outreach efforts with the eight sites taking part in its Shared Care trial for post-transplant care. They believed adding HLA Today as an option for centers participating in Shared Care could improve the patient experience pre-transplant as well as accelerate the time to donor identification.

When a community oncologist uses HLA Today for a patient at the time of diagnosis, Dana-Farber physicians have the preliminary search report and HLA typing information in hand when the patient arrives for consult.

### Key takeaways

Implementing a shared care model before and after transplant can:

- Remove barriers to treatments
- Reduce burdens for patients and their caregivers and improve quality of life
- Enable community physicians to stay connected to their patients

**“ HLA Today accelerates Dana-Farber’s work with new patients to ensure they have an easy transition to Dana-Farber from their referring provider. The program helps us quickly and appropriately confirm donor candidates for a patient’s transplant. ”**

**Cindy Albert**

Director, Donor & Business Services, Cellular Therapies Program

Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

## Expanded partnership is removing barriers to treatment

The NMDP/Be The Match aims to expand patient access to treatment by removing obstacles that exist for transplant centers. For Dana-Farber, that has meant enhancing communication, increasing collaboration, and providing programs that help patients overcome logistical and financial barriers to treatment.

### Collaboration helps mitigate challenges and develop process improvements

In 2019, Dana-Farber embarked on a new partnership with the NMDP/Be The Match that has facilitated deeper collaboration between the two organizations. They were one of the first transplant centers in the Network to participate in the Local Provider Partnership program.

Through the program, a Clinical Operations Partner from the NMDP/Be The Match, Jason DeLeon, works locally alongside the transplant center team and an NMDP/Be The Match Case Manager. He helps address the team’s needs, connects them with services and data, and acts as a point of escalation when needed. Examples include:

- Navigating HCT documentation updates with Transplant Center Coordinators
- Working with multi-disciplinary teams to address specific obstacles and barriers
- Connecting physicians to education opportunities
- Adding insight and clarity through data tools using real-time and customized dashboards to provide relevant performance data on product delivery, service levels and case progression

Jason also worked with the Shared Care team at Dana-Farber to understand their goals, then he provided insight into how the HLA Today program could complement those goals.

Through Jason, Dana-Farber and the NMDP/Be The Match have been able to work together to mitigate challenges and develop process improvements more efficiently.

**“ The Dana-Farber Cancer Institute team approaches their partnership with NMDP/Be The Match and the Local Provider Partnership team with open arms. They trust that our intentions are always to enhance their ability to serve patients. Through this collaboration, I know we are taking steps towards making cellular therapy better and more accessible to patients in need.”**

**Jason DeLeon**

Clinical Operations Partner – Boston Based

NMDP/Be The Match

## **Bridging the gap for related donors**

Like many transplant center partners, Dana-Farber worked with the NMDP/Be The Match to facilitate unrelated transplants but used internal resources to facilitate related donor transplants. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, bringing related donors to Dana-Farber for workup and collection presented new challenges.

Previously reluctant to use Related Donor Services, the Dana-Farber Transplant program worked with Jason to understand these obstacles and presented the program's benefits for donors and patients that remove financial and logistical barriers to transplant.

Key benefits for Dana-Farber included:

- Donor access to NMDP/Be The Match resources, including coverage of the donor's expenses for travel and ancillary costs
- Donor convenience to stay close to home versus traveling to Boston for workup and collection
- Ability to continue to collect from relatives living overseas during COVID-19, which would not have been possible otherwise
- Access to patient financial assistance from the NMDP/Be The Match before and after transplant when Related Donor Services is used through collection

For Dana-Farber, Related Donor Services has been particularly useful when the related donor lives outside the U.S.

For example, it was impossible for a related donor living in Nigeria to travel to Boston for collection during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even if the pandemic was not a barrier, the cost of travel would have prevented the related donor from coming to the U.S. Instead, by working through Related Donor Services, the related donor was able to travel to South Africa for collection with financial support for travel and lodging.

With Jason's support to integrate the program into their center's operations, Dana-Farber has continued partnering with the NMDP/Be The Match to use Related Donor Services for domestic and international relatives even as travel restrictions have eased.

## Key takeaways

Expanding the partnership between a transplant center and the NMDP/Be The Match can:

- Improve collaboration, communication and problem solving in a way that's customized to the transplant center's challenges
- Lead to the implementation of programs that can remove logistical barriers to treatment
- Enable more patients and donors to access patient financial assistance from the NMDP/Be The Match

**“ We have been very pleased with the support offered to us by the Related Donor Services program. This program has allowed donors to donate closer to home, minimizing donor travel and time commitment. Related Donor Services has been particularly valuable for our international patients and their families.”**

**Cindy Albert**

Director, Donor & Business Services, Cellular Therapies Program  
Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

## Conclusion

Through research, innovative programs and collaboration, Dana-Farber and the NMDP/Be The Match are working to remove barriers to consultation, treatment and post-treatment care; expand treatment options for all patients; and improve patient outcomes.

The steps they have taken together can be used as a model for other transplant centers to expand their suite of services to support patients in navigating their care across the continuum. Key steps include:

- Establishing partnerships with community oncologists and hematologists to improve collaboration and encourage earlier referrals for consult
- Identifying and removing logistical and financial barriers to treatment
- Growing transparent communication and collaboration between the transplant center and NMDP/Be The Match to customize solutions for your transplant center's unique challenges

Your NMDP/Be The Match Clinical Operations Partner or relationship manager can discuss how we can work together with your transplant center in improving access to care.

Or find additional information online at:

**[Network.BeTheMatchClinical.org/Support](https://Network.BeTheMatchClinical.org/Support)**

## Reference

1. Pagel JM, Othus M, Garcia-Manero G, et al. Rapid Donor Identification Improves Survival in High-Risk First-Remission Patients With Acute Myeloid Leukemia. JCO Oncology Practice 2020; 16:6, e464-e475.