

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**SUSAN BUTCHER UNDERGOES TREATMENT FOR LEUKEMIA**

**Bone Marrow Donor Being Sought**

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**Seattle** – Susan Butcher, four-time champion of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race and once the most dominant athlete in her sport, has been diagnosed with acute myelogenous leukemia (AML), a malignant disease of the blood and bone marrow, and is undergoing chemotherapy treatment at Fred Hutchison Cancer Research Center at the University of Washington, Seattle.

Butcher's husband, David Monson, said she was diagnosed late last week and began treatment December 6. Butcher's protocol calls for several months chemotherapy. Then once the leukemia is in remission, she probably will undergo a bone marrow transplant if a suitable donor can be found.

The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society and the National Cancer Institute report that about 12,000 people are diagnosed with AML every year. About 50 cases have been reported in Alaska.

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"We'll be in Seattle for at least six months," he said, "and my job is to take care of Susan. Susan's job is to not worry and focus on her healing. But we've been overwhelmed that people want to help any way they can."

The biggest need right now, he said, is to find a donor whose bone marrow is compatible with Butcher's. The hospital is recruiting donors from her immediate family including Monson and the couple's two daughters, but statistically it's unlikely any of them will provide a match, he said.

The Blood Bank of Alaska is organizing a statewide donor drive on December 30th to test anyone who would like to donate. The process is a simple blood test and samples are sent to the Puget Sound Blood Center. The matching process takes up to two months, and those tested through the Blood Bank of Alaska are entered into the national database for a possible match with anyone in need of a bone marrow transplant.

GCI, Butcher's long-time sponsor, said it would donate funds to the Blood Bank of Alaska to help defray testing costs and provide for a greater pool of possible donors for Susan and all who are afflicted with AML. Up to 500 people can be tested for free. After that, the cost is \$65 per person.

If someone wants to be tested to donate specifically to Butcher, bone marrow compatibility testing is available through a private laboratory called TEPNEL LIFECODES. Upon request, the company will send a kit. The donor takes the kit to a private physician for blood typing, and the blood sample is sent back to the company. Test results are usually known within a week, but donors do not become part of the national registry. The cost for the private test is \$115 for the kit plus the cost of the physician's visit and/or lab fees.

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The National Marrow Donor Program says of the 5.5 million potential donors on the national registry, the chance of a match is one in 20,000 to one in 50,000. Currently, the NMDP facilitates an average of 200 transplants per month and more than 15,000 have donated marrow for patients who are not a family member. The program says once a perfect match is found, the rejection rate is less than 5 percent.

“I think people understand there’s a very small chance their bone marrow will be a match,” Monson said, “but someone is going to save Susan’s life through a bone marrow donation. If they go on the register, they have the possibility to save someone else’s life. This process is so important, and this call for help is for everybody who needs a bone marrow donor.”

Monson said updates on her progress will be posted on [www.susanbutcher.com](http://www.susanbutcher.com). The site also will provide a place where people can find out how they can contribute to the family’s needs. Wells Fargo has set up the Susan Butcher Donation Account and donations can be made at any Wells Fargo branch in the country.

“Susan will fight this as hard as any person can,” Monson said. “She loves her family and she loves her life. That will be what keeps her motivated through the hard times.”

Information about bone marrow donations can be found at [www.bonemarrowtest.com](http://www.bonemarrowtest.com) or [www.bloodbankofalaska.org](http://www.bloodbankofalaska.org) or [www.bonemarrow.org](http://www.bonemarrow.org). To contact TEPNEL LIFECODES, contact 1.800.915.3695. To contact the Blood Bank of Alaska, call 907.376.1195. Information on the disease and treatment options can be found at [www.leukemia-lymphoma.org](http://www.leukemia-lymphoma.org) and [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov).

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