



MANILA: Students from the country's state university, the Polytechnic University of the Philippines, queue up with their "lifeline forms" indicating their willingness to donate their internal organs during a nationwide campaign in Manila yesterday. — AP

PHILIPPINES CLAIMS RECORD IN ORGAN DONOR PLEDGES

MANILA: The Philippines has broken India's record of gathering the most organ donor pledges in an hour at a single site, health officials said yesterday. The feat awaits the Guinness World Records' official confirmation.

Health Assistant Secretary Eric Tayag said the campaign gathered 3,548 pledges at an event held at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines' Manila campus, beating India's previous record of 2,755.

At the event, aimed at raising awareness about organ donation, volunteers filled out forms with a checklist of organs they are willing to donate upon death. Those forms were then checked and recorded by organizers.

"We have a lot of countrymen who are in dire

need of organs and this is part of the goal of the Department of Health to remove the stigma attached to donating organs," Tayag said.

He said the record was still unofficial because there were no Guinness adjudicators present. Documented results will be sent to the records body.

The Philippines also hopes to top India's record of 10,450 pledges in a single site in eight hours, and to set new records for the most number of donors signing up in one hour and eight hours in multiple sites.

Aside from Manila, simultaneous registration of donors was held in five other cities.

The results for the other record attempts were not yet available. — AP

TEEN HELPS SCIENTISTS STUDY HER RARE DISEASE

MORE RESEARCH NEEDED

WASHINGTON: First the teenager survived a rare cancer. Then she wanted to study it, spurring a study that helped scientists find a weird gene flaw that might play a role in how the tumor strikes. Age 18 is pretty young to be listed as an author of a study in the prestigious journal *Science*. But the industrious high school student's efforts are bringing new attention to this mysterious disease.

"It's crazy that I've been able to do this," said Elana Simon of New York City, describing her idea to study the extremely rare form of liver cancer that mostly hits adolescents and young adults.

Making that idea work required a lot of help from real scientists: Her father, who runs a cellular biophysics lab at the Rockefeller University; her surgeon at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center; and gene specialists at the New York Genome Center. A second survivor

of this cancer, who the journal said didn't want to be identified, also co-authored the study.

Together, the team reported Thursday that they uncovered an oddity: A break in genetic material that left the "head" of one gene fused to the "body" of another. That results in an abnormal protein that forms inside the tumors but not in normal liver tissue, suggesting it might fuel cancer growth, the researchers wrote. They've found the evidence in all 15 of the tumors tested so far.

It's a small study, and more research is needed to see what this gene flaw really does, cautioned Dr. Sanford Simon, the teen's father and the study's senior author.

But the teen-spurred project has grown into work to get more patients involved in scientific research. Scientists at the National Institutes of Health are advising the Simons on how to set up a

patient registry, and NIH's Office of Rare Diseases Research has posted on its web site a YouTube video in which Elana Simon and a fellow survivor explain why to get involved.

"Fibrolamellar Hepatocellular Carcinoma. Not easy to pronounce. Not easily understood," it says.

Simon was diagnosed at age 12. Surgery is the only effective treatment, and her tumor was caught in time that it worked. But there are few options if the cancer spreads, and Simon knows other patients who weren't so lucky.

Genetic mutations

A high school internship during her sophomore year let Simon use her computer science skills to help researchers sort data on genetic mutations in a laboratory studying another type of cancer.

Simon wondered, why not try the same approach with the liver cancer she'd survived?

The hurdle: Finding enough tumors to test. Only about 200 people a year worldwide are diagnosed, according to the Fibrolamellar Cancer Foundation, which helped fund the new study. There was no registry that kept tissue samples after surgery.

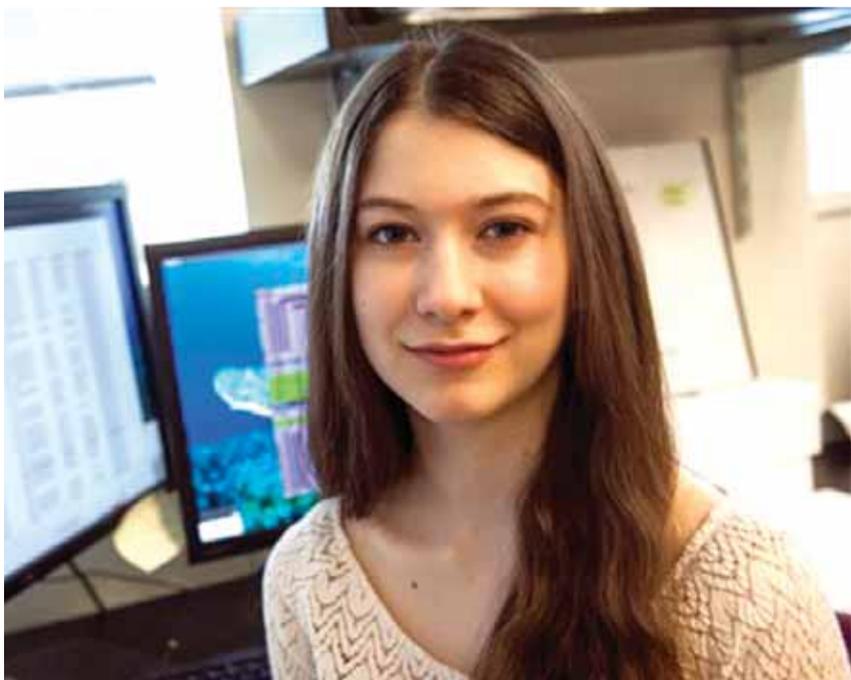
But Simon's pediatric cancer surgeon, Sloan-Kettering's Dr. Michael LaQuaglia, agreed to help, and Simon spread the word to patient groups. Finally, samples trickled in, and Sanford Simon said his daughter was back on the computer helping to analyze what was different in the tumor cells.

At the collaborating New York Genome Center, which genetically mapped the samples, co-author Nicolas Robine said a program called FusionCatcher ultimately zeroed in on the weird mutation.

Sanford Simon said other researchers then conducted laboratory experiments to show the abnormal protein really is active inside tumor cells.

He calls it "an exciting time for kids to go into science," because there's so much they can research via computer.

As for Elana Simon, she plans to study computer science at Harvard next fall. — AP



NEW YORK: This handout photo provided by The Rockefeller University, shows Elana Simon, 18, of New York, pictured in a laboratory at The Rockefeller University in New York. — AP

'PARK BISON CAN BE TRANSFERRED'

BILLINGS: A government-funded experiment on diseased bison herds in Yellowstone National Park shows non-infected animals can be safely removed and used to start new herds, researchers from the US Department of Agriculture and a wildlife group said Thursday.

The results bolster arguments that a species driven to the brink of extinction last century could be restored to parts of its once-vast territory without threatening livestock with disease. Yellowstone's bison are prized for their pure genetics. About half of them test positive for exposure to brucellosis, which causes pregnant animals to prematurely abort their young.

Government workers captured and slaughtered thousands of migrating bison over the past two decades to prevent them from coming into contact with cattle herds in Montana. The practice has resumed this winter under a state-federal agreement that calls for controlling the migration and maintaining their population at about 3,000 animals.

By capturing and putting park bison into quarantine, the animals could be declared brucellosis-free within three years, or even sooner with calves and male animals, according to researchers from the US Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and the Wildlife Conservation Society.

Advocates say that means Yellowstone could be used as a supply source for establishing bison herds on public and tribal lands across the West.

More than 200 bison were captured and used in the experiment, which was carried out in partnership with Montana wildlife and livestock officials.

Some bison were killed for testing or after infections appeared. About 60 animals and their offspring remained disease-free and were transferred to tribes on the Fort Peck and Fort Belknap Indian Reservations. The remaining bison are being held on a ranch near Bozeman owned by media mogul Ted Turner until a permanent home is found.

"This will help defuse the argument about brucellosis, that the animals are carrying brucellosis and will give it to cattle around them," said wildlife pathologist Jack Rhyan of the health inspection service. "I'll feel more positive after 1,000 animals have gone through. That's just caution because this disease sometimes crops up where you never think it can."

Efforts to relocate or provide new habitat for the park's surplus bison have stalled recently in the face of livestock industry opposition. Besides concerns over disease, ranchers complain that the animals knock over fencing and eat grass that could otherwise go to cattle.

Yellowstone biologists counted 4,600 bison in the park last summer. More than 200 have been killed this winter by hunters, according to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Another 145 animals have been sent to slaughter, and 33 were transferred into another health inspection service experiment dealing with animal contraception, Yellowstone spokesman Al-Nash said.—AP