What are white blood cells?
White blood cells are a part of the immune system which help fight infections.

Why do cancer patients need WBCs?
Cancer therapies such as chemo and radiation cause suppression of the bone marrow, which produces WBCs. Since the patients cannot always produce these cells on their own, sometimes they require white blood cell transfusions.

What is the process for WBC transfusions?
Once the patient’s physician writes an order for WBC transfusions, the clinical team will contact the blood bank to begin this process. A representative from the blood bank will contact the patient and/or family to provide education on the process and to help the family develop an action plan to recruit donors. The recruited donors will then present to one of our donor centers for a prescreening visit. Within 72 hours of this visit, a representative from the blood bank will contact the donor to inform the donor if they are qualified to donate WBCs. If approved to donate, blood bank personnel will then schedule the donor for their pre-donation visit and the WBC donation. For more information on each visit, see the WBC General Information form.

Why do donors have to refrain from taking aspirin, aspirin-containing products, herbal products and energy drinks before their prescreening appointment?
Aspirin causes platelet aggregation, which renders the collected platelets useless and unsuitable for transfusion. Some herbal products, which are often found in energy drinks, mimic the platelet aggregating properties of aspirin. These products are safe to use after the initial prescreening visit.

Which products contain aspirin?
Aspirin, acetylsalicylic acid, Aleve®, naproxen, naproxen sodium, Advil®, and ibuprofen all contain aspirin. So do several over-the-counter cold medications. The only over-the-counter pain reliever that is acceptable is Tylenol®, also known as acetaminophen. Always read the label for active and inactive ingredients in a drug. If there is any question as to whether or not it is safe, please call 713-792-7788 and ask to speak with a nurse.

Why do donors donate platelets during their pre-screening visit?
To ensure that donors can tolerate an apheresis procedure prior to the administration of the stimulation medications, we require donors to give platelets via apheresis, therefore reducing the likelihood of discovering an apheresis intolerance at the last minute. WBC donors are given medications to stimulate their bone marrow to produce extra white cells prior to their donation. If they are unable to tolerate the apheresis procedure to remove these extra cells, they would have an elevated white blood cell count for several days, which could pose some health risks.

How are WBCs collected?
During WBC donation, specific WBCs, or granulocytes, are harvested. This is done through a procedure called apheresis, in which whole blood is removed from the body in small increments and spun in a centrifuge. The spinning allows the blood to separate into the different blood components (red blood cells, white blood cells, platelets and plasma). A valve within the centrifuge collar allows the targeted cells to be collected into a bag, while the remaining components are returned to the donor in addition to a small amount of anticoagulant.

Why do I have to take the stimulation medication at a certain time?
The medication peaks at 12-14 hours, so you should take the medications approximately 12 hours prior to your donation to ensure that your counts are highest during the collection process.

**Are there any risks associated with the medications?**
There are some minor side effects associated with the medications, including fast heart rate, insomnia, and bone pain. Information regarding the drugs and instructions for self-administration are provided during the pre-donation visit.

**How do I find donors?**
Reaching out to friends and family members of the patient is the most successful way to recruit donors. There are many ways to do this, even if the patient is not local:
1. Send an email or letter to friends and family of the patient requesting donors. (Link to sample)
2. Contact members from any social affiliations of the patient:
   a. National organizations (Lion’s Club, Rotary Club, Knights of Columbus, Masons)
   b. Fraternities/Sororities
   c. School alumni
   d. Place an appeal in newsletters or other publications
3. Make an appeal to the patient’s religious organization (local churches, mosques and temples will often sponsor a patient from out of town)
4. Utilize social media (Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, LinkedIn)
5. Contact the patient’s employer and/or coworkers. This is especially helpful in large corporations, the police force, firefighters, and healthcare workers. For out-of-town patients, see if there is a local office that could support the patient
6. For servicemen and women, contact a nearby base or veteran’s organization.
7. For international patients, the embassy can be helpful in contacting local organizations to sponsor the patient.
8. Contact recruitment personnel at (713) 792-7777 for help with any of these ideas or for information regarding a pre-screening blood drive

**Why do I have to help recruit donors?**
The WBC donation process takes place in short intervals over several days. Some people have to take off from work in order to donate. Usually, only donors with a personal connection to the patient will be motivated to devote the time and effort required.

**What if I don’t have transportation?**
From the main MD Anderson campus, you can request a shuttle to and from the Holly Hall Blood Donor Center Monday-Friday 8am-5pm, by calling (713) 792-2338. Many local hotels also offer shuttle service; inquire with hotel personnel for more information. Other means of transportation can be found at http://www.mdanderson.org/patient-and-cancer-information/guide-to-md-anderson/getting-here/transportation.html.