

## Voluntary Blood Donation

Naghmi Asif and Khalid Hassan

Department of Pathology, Islamabad Medical & Dental College, Islamabad  
(Bahria University, Islamabad)

Blood donation and transfusion practices in Pakistan are still very nascent compared to global practices. There are about 170 public and 450 private blood banks in the country that are mostly hospital based. There is however a considerable shortage of blood, even in large cities, with the supply being less than 50% of the requirement. Voluntary Blood Donors are the vital source for provision of safe and quality blood to transfusion centers. According to WHO all countries should aim their transfusion services based on voluntary non remunerated blood donation so that by 2020, 100% of blood donation are from voluntary anonymous donors. Currently the practice of voluntary blood donation in Pakistan is highly unsatisfactory as only 10% of people donate blood voluntarily while 90% is by family and friend as replacement donation or paid donors. Even very low percentage for doctors and paramedics (who are themselves working in hospitals) volunteer for blood donation particularly on regular basis. Moreover, females who are about 50% of the total population are completely under-represented in terms of donations collected.

There are various reasons for this low percentage of voluntary blood donors in our country and these include, inadequate knowledge and negative attitude and misconceptions about blood donation. Various KAP studies have reported various reasons for non- donation as; No one ever asked for it, never thought of donating blood, family does not permit for it, previous bad experience, fear of donation or weakness or weight gain, fear of needle or pain, lack of knowledge and information etc. So there are two main challenges for blood transfusion centers; first is the motivation for voluntary donation and secondly converting first-time donors to become regular donors. Systems should be developed to facilitate mobilization and motivation of safe donors from targeted low risk group young populations. Youth from colleges and universities who are between 18-25 years' age form a very potential group of donors, and need to be encouraged to participate voluntarily in the blood donation activities. WHO has started a programme for promotion of voluntary blood donation among youth (18-25 years). This programme emphasizes on at least 20 blood donations before 25 years of age (Concept of Club 25).

Safe blood is a critical component in improving the health, but the quality and the safety of blood transfusion is still a concern, particularly in the developing countries. The reason for this includes blood collection from unsafe donors, poor laboratory procedures and the inadequate testing of blood.

Blood will be safe if there is a nationally coordinated blood transfusion programme, collection of blood only from voluntary non-remunerated donors, meticulous testing of blood for transfusion transmissible infections and if there is judicious use of blood and its components. Voluntary, non-remunerated blood donation has been universally shown to be the cornerstone of safe blood. Safe transfusion practice which is the symbol of good blood banking means transfusion practice which is safe both for the patient and the donor. Voluntary repeated blood donors are the best as they do not get anything in terms of money or any other reward, need little motivation and do not hide anything in their history. Replacement donors do not fulfil the demands of blood banks as replacement donors do not add anything to blood bank stores, voluntary blood donors not only fulfill the demands of blood bank, their blood is considered to be the safest blood to be transfused, as it is considered to be free of Transfusion-Transmissible Infections (TTI). The prevalence of TTI in blood donations ranges from 0.002% in developed countries to 0.85% in developed and under developed countries for HIV. Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) infections prevalence among blood donations reaches as high as 6% in underdeveloped countries. In different studies done in Pakistan, the prevalence of both infections has been estimated as 1.1%–6.2% for HBV and 2.06%–7.69% for HCV infections. The main reasons for low frequency of TTIs in developed countries is because they have established an adequate supply of safe blood through voluntary blood donation practices and proper screening.

It is thus important to provide adequate information about blood donation both through public awareness campaigns and donor awareness campaigns mainly by arranging seminars/workshops. Electronic and social media in particular may be utilized and would play a lead role for mobilization of voluntary blood donors. Moreover, to overcome the negative attitude to voluntary blood donation, it is important to provide adequate information about donation to potential donors. All the college and university students (both medical and non-medical) should be given interactive awareness sessions on voluntary blood donation.

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