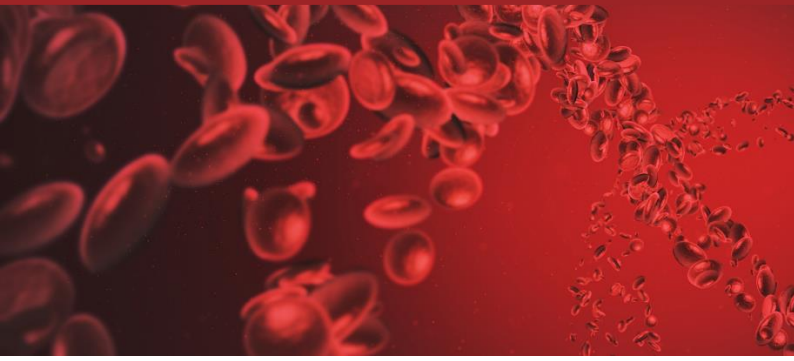




ENHANCING BLOOD DONATION KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES THROUGH EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES



With roughly 8.1 billion people on earth, this amounts to over 40 billion litres of blood, a number difficult to grasp (Worldometer, 2024). Yet, despite this alleged abundance, blood is a scarce commodity essential for the survival of many patients.

Blood and blood products such as plasma, platelets, cryoprecipitate, immune globulins, etc., are required for the management of medical conditions including but not limited to trauma, renal impairment, cancer, sickle cell anaemia, haemorrhagic shock, and other medical conditions related to acute or chronic loss of blood.

If we fail to increase blood availability, we will be unable to meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goal No. 3 of "good health and wellbeing," because reductions in maternal mortality, neonatal mortality, and road deaths depend on increased blood availability and supply.

For years, research has conducted factors that can influence giving blood to convert the data collected into effective methods for recruiting new donors, enhancing communication, and adapting the processes of collection, management, and the use of blood to meet the needs of the donors and, thus, encourage repeat donations.

The usual reports of fear, anxiety, and stress are the main reasons deterring blood donations for new donors, including access to information that

influences blood donation. Thus highlights the need for more specific information, especially regarding safety protocol issues and eligibility criteria.

For this reason, when educating the public on the importance of blood donations, it should also address preventive measures and adequate debunking of disease-related blood donation myths while provisioning personal protective equipment to donors and staff, including the compulsory use of both hand sanitisers as an extra safety measure and infrared thermometers screening measures to check the body temperature of all the donors in the facilities.

Moreover, for the collected blood and blood products to be harnessed judiciously, a blood donation database and a blood inventory management system are critical to preventing stock outages in emergencies. Therefore, establishing a safe blood supply of voluntary non-remunerated blood donors (VNRBD) innovation and technology are critical factors.

In addition to innovation and technology requirements, education doesn't only establish a positive influence on attitudes towards blood donation, this knowledge also establishes a safe blood supply based on VNRBD.

Due to its high fertility rate, sub-Saharan Africa has a very young population: 60% are below 25 years old.

Therefore, adolescents are a potential source of immense interest, not only for the blood they supply but also because information on the subject of "blood donation" sparks the spread of healthy lifestyles, creates awareness about one's health, and contributes to the development of a mature and socially responsible individual.

Adolescents giving blood is a likened form of voluntary work towards early adulthood and is a crucial period of an individual's attitude development and pro-social skills. Commitment to voluntary activities for adolescents is the first real possibility of approaching a reality where they are active "producers" rather than "consumers."

There's importance to the active involvement of adolescents by the organisations charged with promoting blood collection, emphasising the critical role of the school, and giving the adolescents a chance to meet with an expert on blood donation because a range of physiological, psychological, and sociodemographic factors influence the willingness to donate blood.

A stimulating approach identified to meet the annual blood transfusion needs can be to design and implement a Youth Club Blood Donation Programme, a project with two milestones focused on three main functions:

Three function areas:

1. Recruitment and retention of young blood donors.
2. Promotion and education on the importance of blood donations to increase public awareness.
3. Organisation of mobile blood donation initiatives in the community.

Milestone 1: Recruitment Questionnaire

Milestone 1 consisted of creating awareness in numerous schools through a questionnaire and direct involvement in developing peer group networks or expert reference figures in the school setting.

The direct-personal involvement was the fundamental basis for developing new recruitment for this target population with attention to examining fears and negative feelings about donation and considering the possible solutions.

The activating of the network project was required to involve young "group leaders" who promote the donation among their peers.

Information through a donor testimony of the same age who recounts his or her own experience encouraged youth at the time he or she became 18 years old via receiving an SMS, letter, or e-mail.

The data collected here showed (i) how adolescents want to be protagonists of their choices and (ii) to receive clear messages that make them reflect on donating. These two aspects dictated how the schools created publicity campaigns and messages for their peers.

One of the preliminary aspects investigated was how much the participants heard about giving blood or whether they knew someone who gave blood. The following sample of questions were part of the questionnaire:

- How much information have you received about giving blood?
- Do you know anyone who donates blood?
- What can make you decide to donate blood?
- Who can influence your choice to donate blood?
- Why would you personally not donate blood?
- How do you imagine a blood donor feels emotionally?
- What features should an advertisement campaign have for donating blood?
- What type of information would you consider important to know when donating blood?
- Imagine that you want to donate blood, what is the thing that would help you decide?

Milestone 2: Award-Based Donation Database

The Award-Based Donation Database was introduced to inspire more young people between the ages of 16 to 25, to donate blood. It was meant to underscore ongoing efforts to expand the database of youth donors, which is crucial for a sustainable blood supply.

In recognising the exemplary efforts of youth blood donors through the award, they encouraged more young people to start donating blood, at least twice a year.

The awards were for instance, health-related incentives such as free medical testing, including cholesterol and prostate-specific antigen (PSA) screening, blood credit, to economic incentives including groceries, tickets to events, lottery, or raffles, but surely not money.

Receiving an award was a surprise and depended on the number of times they donated blood. This inspired a new generation of blood donors who contributed to increasing the proportion of youth in

the blood donor databank and encouraged youths to strive toward the award by making blood donation a part of their lifestyle.

The implication of such a blood donor recruitment approach targeted at young people requires rethinking and adapting policy, organisational, and logistics to the particularities of the target population. Additionally, it should become a habit for both the staff and the donation centre to interact with schools, receiving groups of students or classes, providing support and information for individuals and the group throughout the process, and making the youngsters an active part of the process.

Today, the general approach taken to increase the stock of blood banks is through low-cost mobilisation campaigns targeted at both older and younger generations on digital channels scalable across countries regardless of their economic development. Additionally, the priority of potential donors is being inspired by their parents and siblings, who are already regular blood donors. This approach supports potential donors' decision to join their parents and siblings in giving blood.

Identifying motivational factors affecting blood donation and recruitment of safe and low-risk donors is a challenge in the developing world but also an opportunity that calls for governments continued investment efforts in educating people (especially youth) on the importance of blood donations while improving research evidence in this area. However, to strengthen the donation system, the strategy should consider a country's economic development, local needs, and cultural differences.

While blood supplies are under pressure around the globe, the scarcity issue is significantly more pressing in developing countries, with 40% of globally collected blood donations taking place in developed countries. According to the WHO, blood safety and availability and blood donation shortages are wrecking Africa's already overwhelmed blood transfusion services. They are a guaranteed threat to a positive patient outcome, particularly for children under age 5, who are the recipients of 54% of the 118.5 million blood samples collected in low-income countries.

In Zambia, for instance, there was a sharp decline in the number of blood donations because donors were afraid that by donating their blood, they could contract the virus. The Zambia National Blood Transfusion Services (ZNBS) target for the first quarter of 2020 was 18,750 units, but the institution

barely collected 6,516 units, representing 34.7% of the initial target.

With a recorded decline in blood collection rates and missed targets, the impact casts a shadow on the health and health outcomes of many Zambians, due to the also increased number of pregnant women dying due to haemorrhage (excessive bleeding) while giving birth.

Despite the blood scarcity issues in developing countries, some presidents feel a real obligation to inspire more citizens to help relieve the blood shortage their country is facing. For instance, President Hakainde Hichilema, the first-ever Zambian president to make blood donations among a key priority area of development across the country will be the Guest of Honour commemorating the 20 years of blood donations at a ceremony held at Mulungushi International Conference Centre. We trust his legacy will encourage future leaders to follow this example.

Commemorating the 20 years of blood donations on August 15th, 2024, the ZNBS and the Ministry of Health will recognise and seek committed blood donors with their blood champion organisations for their pivotal role in saving lives and continuing to support the national blood programme. Their theme for this year's event is "Celebrating 20 Years of Giving: Thank You, Donors".

BLOOD DONATION SITES

- **Saturday, August 11th at Lewanika Mall**
- **Monday, August 12th at Levy Mall**
- **Tuesday, August 13th at East Park Mall**
- **Wednesday, August 14th at Manda Hill Mall**

