

World Blood Donor Day and the EDQM

Essential points

- World Blood Donor Day is celebrated each year on 14 June. At present, in 57 countries blood donation is voluntary and unpaid. In 2011, the slogan is “More blood. More life”.
- Since 2004, four core agencies have sponsored the event: the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Federation of Blood Donor Organisations (IFBDO) and the International Society of Blood Transfusion (ISBT).
- The European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & HealthCare (EDQM) of the Council of Europe has been in charge of the activity programme on blood transfusion since 2007.
- Voluntary unpaid donations have long been a tradition in many European countries. Nearly all countries have legislative provisions or guidelines on voluntary and unpaid blood donation. The principle of voluntary and unpaid donations does not exclude compensation for donors, if it is limited to making good the expenses and inconveniences related to the donation. The amount of this financial compensation and the nature of expenses covered are generally set by the legislation in individual countries.
- In June 2010, a poll showed that 37% of Europeans have given blood. The Eurobarometer¹ survey indicated a 6% increase since the last survey was conducted in 2002. The countries revealed to have the highest levels of blood donation were Austria (66%), France (52%), Greece (51%) and the Republic of Cyprus (51%). In contrast, the lowest proportions of respondents who stated that they had already given blood were noted in Portugal (22%), Italy (23%), Poland (25%), Malta (29%) and Sweden (30%).

Summary

The World Health Organization (WHO) is the directing and co-ordinating authority in the health sector within the United Nations system. It is responsible for directing worldwide health action, formulating health research programmes and setting public health standards and criteria.

An international federation founded in 1919 in Paris just after the First World War as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Its aim is to strengthen and unite Red Cross Societies already in existence and to promote the creation of new societies in order to undertake actions fostering health.

The International Federation of Blood Donor Organisations (IFBDO) was set up in Luxembourg on 4 December 1955. The aim is to create an organisation in which the main supporters of blood transfusion can meet and share their concerns.

The International Society of Blood Transfusion (ISBT) is a scientific society founded in 1935

¹ *Source: Survey commissioned by the European Union.

with the aim of promoting the study of blood transfusion. Its membership is spread over 85 countries. The society organises international conferences and pursues the political levelling and harmonisation of the blood transfusion sector.

For many years the Council of Europe has supported World Blood Donor Day, held on 14 June each year, in order to give this cause worldwide media exposure. Through this action, the Council of Europe aims to progress attitudes to further this cause.

This year a media campaign in kit form has been made available to member states for promoting donation among the public on the occasion of World Blood Donor Day. The campaign comprises original visual material, a brochure, a poster, stickers, postcards, smart cards and various promotional gadgets suitable for adaptation into all European languages.

Work on blood transfusion in the Council of Europe began in the 1950s. Since the beginning the guiding principles that inspired the relevant activities have been:

- promotion of voluntary, unremunerated donation,
- mutual assistance,
- optimum use of blood and blood products, and
- protection of donor and recipient.

A major achievement of the Council of Europe in this respect is the regularly updated publication of the “*Guide to the preparation, use and quality assurance of blood components*”; currently in its 16th Edition (2010). The guide contains recommendations aimed at blood banks and transfusion agencies on collection of blood, blood components, technical procedures, transfusion practices and quality assurance systems, describing a set of measures to guarantee the safety, quality and efficacy of blood components. It constitutes a fundamental benchmark in defining a “gold standard” for transfusion services.

The European Committee on Blood Transfusion of the Council of Europe – comprising 35 European countries and 9 observer countries, together with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Commission – concentrates on producing stringent standards of ethics, quality and safety in this field. The outcomes of this work are disseminated to the member states in order to stimulate evolution of national legislation.

Questions and answers

What is the role of the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & HealthCare (EDQM), Council of Europe, in this respect?

The EDQM helps to uphold everybody’s essential right to have access to good quality medicines and health care. It promotes and protects human health, notably by:

- laying down quality standards for the manufacture and control of medicines in Europe (through a European Pharmacopoeia comprising over 2,200 legally binding standards) and beyond its boundaries;
- ensuring the application of these official standards to the substances used for producing medicines;
- co-ordinating a network of ninety official medicine control laboratories in thirty-one countries;
- co-operating with national and international organisations to combat trade in illegal and counterfeit medical and medicinal products.

- developing guidance and standards in the areas of blood transfusion, organ transplantation and consumer health issues.

To achieve its goals in the area of blood transfusion, the Council of Europe has focused its work on the study of ethical, legal and organisational aspects, so as to ensure quality, increase the supply of blood, avert wastage of substances of human origin, and determine the possible impact of new scientific developments from an ethical and organisational standpoint.

In 2010, the following question was asked in several European countries: “Have you already given blood?”

Just under four in ten (37%) Europeans have given blood before.

Behaviour and attitudes towards blood donation and transfusion: Population studies show that men have given blood more often than women (44% of men compared to 31% of women). The group most likely to have given blood (46%) is the 40-54 year-old age group.

People in middle management have donated most often (49%), followed by persons who completed their education at 20 years of age or over (46%), the self-employed (44%). Conversely, students and persons aged 15-24 are the lowest category in terms of blood donations (19% and 21%, respectively), with persons engaged in home duties donating only slightly more (25%).

An analysis of blood donation at country level reveals some significant differences, but no particular geographical skew. The variation in results is significant, ranging from 22% in Portugal to over 66% in Austria. The most significant increases in blood donation levels between the 2002 and 2009 Eurobarometer surveys are recorded in Austria (up from 51% to 66%), France (up from 38% to 52%), Greece (up from 40% to 51%), Spain (up from 25% to 41%), and Germany (up from 31% to 41%).

The majority of Europeans (57%) think that the safety of transfusions has improved, or as safe (23%) over the past 10 years. The 2002 and 2004 European directives contributed to this perception by harmonising certain technical requirements relating to blood and blood components.

What average proportion of the population does it take to meet a country’s needs?

It suffices for 1-3% of the population to give blood in order to supply a country’s needs. But, unfortunately, in 73 countries worldwide, the proportion is less than 1%. Some 60 percent of the world’s blood supply goes to 18 percent of the population, leaving 82% of the global population inadequately covered.

Who can be a blood donor?

Each country has its own selection criteria for blood donors. As a rule, the following conditions must be met:

- be in good health;
- weigh over 45-50 kilos;
- be 16-70 years of age (18-65 in some countries);
- comply with all the rules aimed at protecting both donors and persons who may be transfused with the blood.

What is the status of blood donations in France?

In France, blood services are mainly provided by the *Etablissement Francais du Sang* (EFS).

In 2010, the EFS collected 3,053,010 donations. More than 40,000 mobile blood collection vans, 153 fixed-site blood collections and 17 blood transfusion centres organise the collection of blood and 423,570 new donors were registered last year.

52% of French citizens have given blood. Men constitute 58% of blood donors (women 46%). The 18-24 age group represents 30% of the total number of donations, whereas blood donors of between 40-54 years of age represent 62%, and persons aged 55+ represent 57%.

There is a stronger mobilisation in the countryside, since 23% of donors live in a municipality with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants. By contrast, the Paris conurbation, accounting for 20% of the national population, represents only a little below 11% of blood donors.

Regional variations are quite pronounced. Despite an approximate national average rate of 1.56 donations/year, the figure may approach 2 donations/year in some regions and, for example, be limited to 1.3 in the Île-de-France region.

How is blood donation in Germany organised?

In Germany, blood services are provided by four types of organisations. Most of the whole blood donations (75 %) are organized by the German Red Cross Blood Transfusion Services (DRK). The DRK has seven blood transfusion services, including 36 donation centres.

Several blood-donation services are organised at universities and some hospitals by the Federal States of Germany. These organisations do about 19 % of the whole blood donations. The third group are private commercial companies. They do about 6 % of the German whole blood donations which are totally by 4,749,000.

With 3.8 million whole blood donations and 300,000 other types of donations such as plasma and platelet apheresis, the DRK generates the major supply of blood components for clinics and hospitals in the federal states Germany.

The DRK bears the responsibility for the continuous and safe supply of blood components for a population of over 81 million people in 16 federal States of Germany. The major share of blood donations is collected through mobile donation campaigns. More than 218 mobile collection teams organise about 49,000 donor drives per year that generate about 93% of the entire donated blood volume. The fraction of first-time donors is approximately 9 %, and the donor deferral rate is approximately 8%. The mobile collection teams are associated with individual institutes and collect blood donations within their region.

According to studies, 41% of Germans have given blood. Blood donors are broken down into 64 % men and 36 % women. The 18-24 age group represents 18% of the total number of donations, while blood donors of between 40-54 years of age represent 51%, and persons aged 55+ represent 43%.

And what about blood donation in Sweden?

Sweden is largely self-sufficient in blood products, but is dependent on a supply of new blood donors. 30% of Swedes have given blood. Blood donors are broken down into 34 % men and 26 % women. The 18-24 age group represents 10% of the total number of donations, blood donors of between 40-54 years of age represent 41%, and persons aged 55+ represent 31%.

There are more than 410,000 registered donors in Sweden (5 % of the population). About 260,000 of those donors donate blood at least once a year. The problem occurs in the summertime (July-August), when Sweden's hospitals suffer a shortage of blood. Mid-summer

weekends are traditionally busy weekends for travelling and a busy time for hospitals as road accidents are common.

In Stockholm, the demand is for approximately 100 litres of blood a day, which is provided by 40,000 donors (3 % of the municipality's inhabitants). To meet the demand, Stockholm Blood Centre has focused on communication to encourage existing donors to donate more often through its five blood buses and five blood centres.

By the end of 2009, a complementary strategy was trialled, using the predictable shortage in the upcoming summer 2010 as a call to action for new donors. To lower the threshold and generate awareness among new donors and to increase media interest, a digital platform and a new service was created. The database for the blood bank in Stockholm provides real-time statistics for different blood groups to the hospitals, with a new website named www.bliblodgivare.nu ('become a blood donor now'). Visitors to the website can now see the actual blood bank status in real-time, book an appointment at their nearest blood bank, and share their generous gesture on Facebook.

As this blood shortage had become a reality in May 2010, it created huge media interest and all media attention turned to Stockholm and to the new website.

The Swedish Blood Centre, which organises 90 blood centres, is now developing a new website to show real-time statistics for blood shortages nationwide, with bliblodgivare.nu as a model.

What are the other Council of Europe reference texts on blood transfusion?

Resolution CM/Res (2008)5 on donor responsibility and on limitation to donation of blood and blood components, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 12 March 2008;

Terms of reference adopted on 6 February 2007 by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe;

Report of the Council of Europe member states on the Collection, Testing and Use of Blood and Blood Components in Europe, 2001-2006;

Activities of Blood Banks in the Council of Europe member states related to Bone Marrow Transplantations, March 2008;

Pathogen Reduction Technologies for Blood Components for Transfusion, March 2008.

Further information: www.coe.int, www.edqm.eu, www.dondusang.net,
www.blutspende.de, www.geblod.nu

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