

# **World Blood Donor Day**

PSN MIC, 14<sup>th</sup> June 2023

June 14<sup>th</sup>, every year has been designated the World Blood Donor Day. The campaign slogan for 2023 is "**Give blood, give plasma, share life, share often.**" This slogan aims to show appreciation for willing blood donors and spread knowledge about the significance of safe blood donation. It also presents a chance to urge governments and national health authorities to allocate sufficient funds and set up the necessary infrastructures and processes to increase the collection of blood from willing, unpaid blood donors.

## **The Importance of Blood Donation**

Blood donation plays a vital role in ensuring a sufficient supply of safe blood for health emergencies and treatments, both as whole blood and its components, which when separated could be used for various health purposes. Accidents, surgeries, childbirth complications and medical conditions like sickle cell disease necessitate the availability of an adequate blood supply. The donor, knowing that voluntarily giving blood saves lives and the recipient experiencing improved health outcomes result in both the donor and recipient healthier and fulfilled.

Excess iron in the system is not good for anyone, as the excess is stored in many organs and more worrying are the excesses in the liver, pancreas and heart, causing life-threatening conditions, such as liver disease, diabetes and heart problems. Some of the symptoms resulting from excess iron in the system include fatigue (feeling tired a lot), general weakness, irregular heartbeat, pain in the knuckles of the first and middle fingers ("iron fist,"), joint pain, stomach pain and unexplained weight loss. It is interesting to note that more men suffer from these symptoms and diseases than women. This may be explained with the fact that menstruating women get rid of iron during the monthly flow while men do not. How is this excess rectified? Venesection (phlebotomy), the same thing done during blood donation – removal of blood, including red blood cells that contain iron – is the solution! The body then uses up more iron to replace the removed quantity, helping to reduce the amount of iron in the body. Voluntarily donating is therefore therapeutic in many instances.

## **The Need for Blood in Nigeria**

Nigeria, with its large population and diverse healthcare needs, often faces blood shortages, as ridiculously low number of people voluntarily donate blood. Only about 5% of donor blood used in Nigeria is obtained from voluntary donors; family replacements and paid donors are still the major sources of donor blood procurement. The blood banking system in Nigeria is still poorly developed as a number of centres depend on paid donors. This is disadvantageous because haematological and infectious status of this category of donors may not be determined oftentimes prior to blood donations. Unfortunately, the demand often outpaces the supply, resulting in a critical shortage of safe and compatible blood. Very much more voluntary donations are therefore needed in Nigeria.

## **Encouraging Blood Donation in Nigeria**

While the importance of blood donation cannot be overstated, raising awareness and encouraging more Nigerians to become regular blood donors remains crucial. Here are some key steps to promote blood donation in the Nigerian context:

- **Education and Awareness:** Spreading knowledge about the importance and benefits of blood donation is essential. This could be done by collaborating with healthcare organisations, schools, community groups and the media to disseminate accurate information about the blood donation process, dispelling myths and misconceptions and emphasising the impact of blood donation on saving lives.
- **Strengthening Blood Banks and Infrastructure:** Enhancing the capacity of blood banks across the country by improving infrastructure, equipment and storage facilities. This ensures the efficient collection, processing and distribution of donated blood.
- **Partnerships and Mobilisation:** Forging partnerships between government agencies, healthcare institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations to organise blood drives and donation campaigns. Mobile blood collection units can travel to different locations, making it convenient for individuals to donate.
- **Incentives and Recognition:** Considering implementation of incentives to encourage blood donation, such as certificates of appreciation, small tokens of gratitude, or priority access to certain medical services. Publicly acknowledging and recognising regular blood donors to inspire others to follow suit.
- **Collaboration with Religious and Traditional Leaders:** Engaging religious and traditional leaders to promote blood donation within their communities. Their influence can help dispel misconceptions and encourage a positive attitude toward blood donation.

Let us use this year's World Blood Donor Day as a reminder of the critical need for safe blood donation in the Nigerian context. By celebrating the selfless act of blood donation and creating awareness about its impact, we can foster a culture of voluntary blood donation. Through collective efforts, education and strengthened infrastructure, we can overcome blood shortages and ensure that Nigerians have access to a sustainable and adequate blood supply, ultimately saving countless lives.

There is that joy for the donor to know that the life someone (s)he may never meet is spared from death or at least given a new lease of life. On this special day, let us honour the blood donors who have made a difference and encourage more Nigerians to join this noble cause. Together, we can make a positive impact on healthcare and create a healthier and stronger Nigeria.

Remember, one donation can save a life. Be a hero – donate blood!

Happy World Blood Donor Day!