

Promoting Inclusivity in Blood Donation: Public Health

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ABSTRACT

The practice of blood donation supports community unity, as it brings all individuals on a common platform where they help each other and the health system in the mission to save human lives. Regardless of the wide scope and merits of blood donation in saving lives and improving health, it is a fact that many patients who are in need do not receive safe blood timely. As the existing pool of donors cannot meet the requirements of everyone, it is the need of the hour to appeal to and encourage a diverse group of blood donors to support the healthcare delivery system. Acknowledging the need to have a diverse pool of donors, we must promote inclusivity in blood donation and this will require a combination of multiple strategies. In conclusion, the availability of a diverse blood donor base makes it extremely useful for patients from different backgrounds by making the entire process compatible and safe. Many barriers have been identified that could limit the inclusivity in blood donation, and this will require a comprehensive approach to ensure that all communities are equally represented in the donor pool, ultimately leading to a more diverse and adequate blood supply.

Keywords: Blood donation, Inclusivity, Awareness, Community

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INTRODUCTION

The practice of blood donation supports community unity, as it brings all individuals on a common platform where they help each other and the health system in the mission to save human lives.¹ Blood donation tends to directly impact different aspects of healthcare, making it a crucial and indispensable contribution to public health.^{1,2} The global estimates suggest that out of the 120 million approximately blood donations reported worldwide, 40% and 60% are collected from high-income and low- and middle-income nations respectively.² Blood donation is essential for emergency care, major surgeries, trauma patients, antenatal mothers who experienced blood loss during childbirth, patients with blood disorders, etc.² Regardless of the wide scope and merits of blood donation in saving lives and improving health, it is a fact that many patients who are in need do not receive safe blood timely.¹⁻³

Role of diversity in enhancing blood donation outcomes

The provision of safe and adequate blood to the beneficiaries has been acknowledged as one of the crucial components of the health care policy of any nation.^{1,2} As the existing pool of donors cannot meet the requirements of everyone, it is the need of the hour to appeal to and encourage a diverse group of blood donors to support the healthcare delivery system.⁴ The availability of a diverse donor pool can meet the needs of patients from different backgrounds, including those who have unique blood distribution.⁵ It is a known fact that certain specific ethnic groups are home to specific blood types (viz. Bombay phenotype) and rare blood variants, and thus if these people donate blood, health workers will succeed in finding compatible matches.⁵⁻⁶

Moreover, transfusion of closely matched blood not only reduces the risk of transfusion reaction but even brings about an improvement in transfusion outcomes by augmenting patient safety.^{6,7,8} Further, the availability of a diverse blood supply brings about a massive reduction in healthcare disparities and improves the trust of marginalized groups in the healthcare delivery system.^{2,8} In addition, the availability of a broad and diverse pool of blood donors improves the resilience and response of the health system promptly responding to the needs of people from varied backgrounds, irrespective of their ethnic or genetic makeup.^{6,9} Finally, as we encourage blood donation among underrepresented groups of people, it plays an important role in establishing a culture of blood donation, which is crucial for mankind.^{2,6,7}

Strategies promoting inclusivity in blood donation

Acknowledging the need to have a diverse pool of donors, we must promote inclusivity in blood dona-

tion and this will require a combination of multiple strategies.^{6,7} This begins with initiatives to foster community engagement, which can be achieved by building liaisons with community leaders, faith groups, and local organizations to increase awareness about the importance of blood donation in heterogeneous population groups.¹⁰ This process of ensuring community engagement is crucial as it will make the blood donation practices sustainable even in the absence of external motivation. The awareness and outreach campaigns should be organized in such a way that they are culturally sensitive and appeal to the needs of different ethnic and demographic categories of people.^{4,9} The purpose of these awareness activities is to make people realize the need and the significance of their contributions to the blood supply and how it can help others who are in immense need.^{11,12} We must encourage the usage of images and stories (and that too in multiple languages) in the educational materials during these campaigns to enhance the reach to a large number of people from various communities.^{2,10-12}

It is a vital approach to train community volunteers about the significance of blood donation, prevailing myths, and the do's and don'ts, and then assign them with the responsibility of creating awareness among their peers and local people.^{12,13} These community volunteers can even seek information from healthcare providers about the patients who might need blood transfusion, and then engage within their local communities to promote blood donation thereby meeting the expected needs.¹⁴ In addition, we must organize training for staff of blood banks in the domain of cultural competence, sensitivity, and inclusivity, and this kind of sensitization will make the donors feel welcome and respectful.¹⁵ Another approach will be to implement mobile donation units that can travel to underserved communities, making it much easier for these people to donate without travelling far to a donation center.¹⁶ In-fact, the percentage of voluntary blood collection through mobile units increase from 8.5% to 14.39% within a span of two years.¹⁶ Finally, a feedback system should be established to understand the views and experiences of donors from varied backgrounds, and this obtained information can be used to improve the donation process as well as the experiences of people in the future.¹⁷

Artificial intelligence-based applications have a special role in improving donor recruitment, as they can analyze the demographic, geographical, and behavioral attributes to identify potential donors.¹⁸ Moreover, these systems can send personalized messages through different modes to increase engagement of community members.¹⁹ These applications can use predictive analysis to ascertain the ideal time for carrying out blood donation drives by taking into account demands for blood based on seasons, historical trends, and local events.¹⁸ In-fact, it can even aid in scheduling appointments of individual donors, thereby reducing waiting time and improving the

overall experience of donors.²⁰ Moreover, we cannot ignore the utility of these applications in providing clarifications to queries of donor immediately and hence reduce their concerns.¹⁸⁻²⁰ Further, there are different applications (like Blood4India) that can track blood donations and improve the overall trends.²¹

Addressing barriers to inclusivity in blood donation

Even though we want to promote inclusivity from a diverse group of donors, on the practical front, there have been a few concerns that must be effectively dealt with.^{4,6} The primary barrier is the lack of awareness about blood donation and eligibility requirements to be a blood donor.¹⁰ This calls for the need to create awareness among different population groups with the help of different mass media strategies, local volunteers, and community leaders.^{2,10-12} In addition, the guidelines should be periodically reviewed and accordingly implemented to avoid unnecessary restrictions.²² Moreover, we need to organize awareness sessions in different settings (viz. schools, workplaces, etc.) to make people aware of blood donation and how they can make a difference in the lives of others.^{16,23} Another major barrier has been the cultural beliefs and stigma related to blood donation among specific ethnic and religious groups.^{24,25} The findings of a cross-sectional study done among Portuguese teachers, it was reported that 44% of the study participants found training programs for high school students as motivating, while remaining 56% reported that training program lacked sensitivity.²⁶ This will again require the involvement of community leaders and steps must be taken to make them understand the utility of blood donation.¹⁴ Moreover, the awareness activities must target and cover the possible beliefs and stigma, and also highlight personal success stories of people from their own communities, who donated blood and became a reason for the happiness of others.^{6,9,23}

In continuation, fear and misinformation about the blood donation process have been detrimental in encouraging people to come forward.²⁷ Once again, the awareness activities should clear the possible fears and misconceptions, and make people understand that the process is completely safe.^{24,27} It will be a welcome move to arrange for counselling before donation to clarify any concerns related to blood donation. Further, peer support groups can also prove to be a valuable asset in sharing their personal experiences and providing assurance to people who are new to blood donation.^{23,24} Another concern has been the language barrier, because of which people have not understood the donation procedures and requirements, and thus their participation has not been up to the mark.²⁸ This concern will require the preparation of educational material in multiple languages, the involvement of local community leaders, and hiring those staff at donation centers that can

speak the language of the blood donors and clarify their doubts.²⁸ Some of the donors might have had a negative experience in the past and thus they might not be too motivated to donate blood once again.¹³ This problem can be effectively dealt with by training staff to be more compassionate, initiating feedback mechanisms to take into account the concerns of the patients, and making the environment more comfortable and donor-friendly.¹⁷

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the availability of a diverse blood donor base makes it extremely useful for patients from different backgrounds by making the entire process compatible and safe. Many barriers have been identified that could limit the inclusivity in blood donation, and this will require a comprehensive approach to ensure that all communities are equally represented in the donor pool, ultimately leading to a more diverse and adequate blood supply.

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