BLOOD ADVOCACY WEEK 2023
APRIL 24-28
BUILDING A STRONGER BLOOD SUPPLY TOGETHER

IT'S ABOUT LIFE: WHY DONOR DIVERSITY IS CRITICAL TO PATIENT CARE

Patients with conditions like Sickle Cell disease or thalassemia require frequent blood transfusions and finding a compatible unit of blood is more complex than just identifying a simple blood type. For these patients, a blood transfusion must be closely matched to their ethnic background to avoid potentially severe transfusion complications. While a wide variety of conditions require ongoing blood transfusions as part of their care management, two examples include:

- **Sickle Cell disease** (SCD)[i] is an inherited disorder that impacts the shape of the red blood cells that are needed to carry oxygen throughout the body. The red blood cells are sickle or crescent shaped and are rigid and sticky. SCD can cause extreme pain, frequent infections, anemia, vision problems, bone and joint damage, and other problems. SCD is substantially more common among African Americans than any other racial group, occurring in approximately one out of every 365 African-American births. While clinical trials of stem cell transplant show great promise as a cure for SCD, currently there is no cure, and treatment focuses on symptom management. Blood transfusions provide healthy red blood cells and are a first line treatment for symptom management.

- **Thalassemia** [ii] is an inherited blood disorder that causes the body to not make enough hemoglobin, a part of red blood cells important for the transportation of oxygen throughout the body. Thalassemia is more common in people from Mediterranean counties, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Regular blood transfusions are the only treatment currently available for the treatment of moderate to severe thalassemia.

The closely-matched blood often required by patients with SCD and thalassemia is more likely to come from a donor with a similar racial and ethnic background.[iii] Since these conditions disproportionately impact minority populations, there is an urgent need to diversify the donor base to ensure blood is available to meet patient needs.

One essential way to diversify the blood way is to increase donation rates among younger generations, who are increasingly more diverse. In fact, nearly half of post-Millenials are racial or ethnic minorities.[iv] Despite the importance of this, nearly 60 percent of blood donations still come from individuals over 40, and nearly 45 percent come from individuals older than 50.[v]Even more concerning, between 2017-2019, there was a 10.1 percent decrease in donations from 16-18-year-olds, and 15.1% decrease in donations from 19-24-year-olds. This lack of donation at younger ages is a concerning indicator for whether these individuals will donate later in life at a rate sufficient to replace donors in aging generations.

To grow and diversity the donor base, America's Blood Centers is asking Congress to develop and implement a new pilot program that would provide grant funding to support blood centers' efforts to reach young and diverse blood donors, ensuring current and future patient needs are met.

MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about Blood Advocacy Week, visit www.BloodAdvocacyWeek.org
To learn more about America's Blood Centers, visit AmericasBlood.org

Sources:
[i] https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/sicklecell/facts.html
[ii] https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/thalassemia/facts.html
[iii] ttps://journals.lww.com/nursingresearchonline/Fulltext/2019/05000/Facilitators_and_Barriers_to_Minority_Blood.6.aspx
[iv] https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2018/11/15/early-benchmarks-show-post-millennials-on-track-to-be-most-diverse-best-educated-generation-yet/
[v] https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/3991343-2012-2014-AABB-Donor-Hemovigilance-Report.html