Original Research Paper

Attitudes of Medical Students towards non-remunerated blood donation: Is blood for sale?

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ABSTRACT

Background: Blood donation is a major concern in Namibia and worldwide. Blood demand far outweighs its supply. Regular non remunerated blood donors are the mainstay of adequate and safe blood supply. The healthy, active and willing big population of students can be potential pool for blood donors to meet the safe blood requirements for a country.

Aim: The aim of this study was to evaluate the attitudes of Faculty of Health Science students of University of Namibia (UNAM) towards non-remunerated blood donation.

Methods: A descriptive cross sectional study was conducted on Faculty of Health Science Students of UNAM between July and September 2015. Participants were given structured questionnaires. Data analysis was performed using EPI-INFo and association between variables was tested at 95% confidence level.

Results: The study enrolled 311 students from Faculty of Health Science with (75) from School of Medicine, (32) School of Pharmacy and (204) from School of Nursing and Public Health of University of Namibia. Seventy two percent of these students (224) had never donated blood and only 28% did donate on a regular basis. This study found out that there was higher number of students (83%) who wanted to be remunerated in order for them to donate blood with 63% of them being female students (p = 0.0144) and nearly half (49%) of them saying it is a way of earning income.

Conclusion. The blood donations drive should be intensified through campaigns, workshops, conferences and seminars and regular visits to different institutions of learning like schools, colleges and universities so that these students attitudes can be reversed.

Key words: Remunerated, Non-remunerated blood donation, attitudes, medical students.

INTRODUCTION

Blood Transfusion is the process of receiving blood products and use in a variety of medical conditions to replace lost components of blood. Blood is a scarce resource and its demand far outweighs supply. The demand for blood and blood products in most countries continue to increase because of the rise in human life expectancy, road traffic accidents, new and aggressive surgical as well as new therapeutic methods which require large quantities of blood and blood products (WHO, 2006). There is shortage of active blood donors to meet these increasing demand, in addition to limited supply, the safety especially with regard to the risk of
transfusion and transmissible infection is also an issue of utmost concern especially in the developing countries. There is a need to increase the number of regular voluntary non-remunerated blood donors through the creation of new avenues and to establish mechanisms and strategies to ensure effective retention of new and present donors. Regular donors are the mainstay of an adequate and safe blood supply. With the increase in demand for blood products due to loss during delivery, road traffic accidents, new surgical and medical procedures, more research should be done to seek new ways to recruit people to donate blood for free. Blood procurement from voluntary non-remunerated donor has been adjudged as the safest source of blood (Benedict et al, 2012). Hence, the World Health Organization (WHO) adopted a policy aimed at 100% voluntary non-remunerated donor blood procurement by the year 2020 (WHO, 2008).

In developed countries, non-remunerated, healthy volunteer repeat donors form the foundation of safe blood supply. In most developing, transitional countries and a few developed countries like the USA and Russia, in contrast, family replacements and paid blood donors are still regarded as an important source of blood components for transfusion. The challenge in efforts to meet the demand for blood is the fact that only a small percentage of the eligible population actually choose to donate blood on a regular basis and that a significant percentage of eligible donors are deferred temporarily or permanently because of strict deferral criteria (Benedict et al, 2012). In many countries of the world, the blood transfusion service are a preserve of the government, which is responsible for blood donations collected from voluntary, non-remunerated donors. So regular or repeat blood donors are usually encouraged, while collection from first time donors of whom the risk of infection transmission is higher, is usually minimized hence, it is safer to have repeat blood donors. (Lohrke B, 2010).

This study was conducted to ascertain the attitude of Faculty of Health Science students towards non-remunerated blood donation. The main aim of the study was to evaluate these students’ attitudes towards blood donation.

METHODS

This was a descriptive cross sectional study carried out at the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Namibia (UNAM) Windhoek, where 311 students were recruited for the study from July to September, 2015 after ethical clearance from the Faculty of Health Science, Ministry of Health and Social Services Ethics Review Committee. Faculty of Health Science comprised School of Medicine, School of Pharmacy, School of Nursing and Public Health. A questionnaire was adopted from study by Hoases (Hoases, 2013) with some modifications detailing the demographic characteristics of the students like year of study, department, gender and age; it also looked at blood donation practices, opinion and knowledge about blood donation. The questionnaire had both open and close ended questions. A questionnaire was piloted on a few students and ambiguous questions were clarified before main study was done. A pre-test questionnaire was handed out by a trained research assistant to administer to 311 students who were chosen by systematic random sampling after an informed consent was obtained. The data collected was analyzed EPI-INFO (version 7.0) with a statistical significance being defined as p value < 0.05.

RESULTS

A total of 311 students were selected for this study and given pre-test questionnaire and all of them (100%) returned it. Majority of the students 62% (206) were females as shown in Figure 1 below. Seventy two percent of the students (224) had never donated blood while only 28% donated blood on a regular basis. It was also found that 54% of the students who donated blood were females (p=0.0037). Eighty three percent of the students (83%) want to be remunerated (paid) in order for them to donate blood with female students being a majority at 63% (p = 0.0144) shown in Figure 2. Students gave various reasons for remunerations (payments) as shown in Figure 3.

DISCUSSION

This study recruited about 311 students from Faculty of Health Science, in the University of Namibia and showed a greater number of students (83%) had a positive attitude towards remuneration for blood donation. About 14% of them claimed that by rewarding donors, the number of blood donors would increase. They also said that they would be motivated as students to donate as this would be one of the avenues by which they get income, (49%), replace blood donated (35%), and as a token for appreciation (2%). This study also found that majority of the students had never donated blood (72%) with a few of them (28%) being regular donors. It was also found that 54% of the students who donated blood were females (p=0.0037). This could be because majority of the students admitted into the faculty are female (personal observation). Compared with another study, the majority of donors (86%) donated blood for an ill family member (Bourne PA, 2013). Pablo Rodriguez del Pozo, (1994) stated in his article that “Cash blood is not necessarily bad blood; cheap blood probably is”. As Kessel noted, the problem is not that people receive cash for donating; it is that healthy people are not paid enough to meet the needs of the blood-supply system (Kessel, 1984). At the same time, the donor should not receive any compensation until the blood has been judged acceptable, a measure which could help discourage high-risk individuals from
giving. Therefore, the World Health Organization (WHO) has adopted a policy which aimed at 100% voluntary non-remunerated donor blood procurement by the year 2020 (WHO, 2008).

There are three major types of blood donation: voluntary unpaid donations (non-remunerated/altruistic), family/replacement donations (coerced), and paid donations. An adequate blood and stable supply depends on volunteer non-remunerated blood donations. It's known that donors who give blood voluntarily, regularly and for altruistic reasons have the lowest prevalence of HIV, hepatitis viruses and other blood-
borne infections, as compared to people who donate for friends and family members or because of payment (Politis, 2000).

In Europe, there is no country where a system of paid blood donation prevails, and non-remunerated blood donation has been established for many years in the majority of the member states. Meanwhile in many Central and Eastern European countries, there is a mixture of systems and it is among the objectives of most of them to include voluntary non-remunerated blood donation in their health sector (Politis, 1993).

This trend is worrying bearing in mind that most of the blood donation campaigns target institutions of higher learning. Worse still, this cohort of students would be more informed about the benefits of blood donation since they are going to work in a healthcare setting.

Blood transfusion is an essential part of modern health care since much of medical care is dependent on a regular supply of safe blood from healthy volunteer donors. So if used correctly, it can be a life-saving intervention. Every day, people around the world of all ages need blood transfusions to survive. Over a million blood units are collected from donors every year; however, many more millions still need to be collected to meet the global demand and ensure sufficient and timely provision of blood (Damesyn et al., 2003).

This study highlights the need for health promotion campaigns about blood donation with recruitment targeting new donors less willing to donate and at the same time reinforcing the positive attitude of those who have already donated so that they become regular non-remunerated blood donors. The blood donations drive should be intensified through campaigns, workshops, conferences and seminars and regular visits to different institutions of learning like schools, colleges and universities so that these students attitudes can be reversed. The recruitment and retention of regular blood donors with low-risk behavior can only be achieved through the establishment of a national blood donor recruitment program, staffed by trained personnel, and backed by an active information, education and motivation campaign. Regular donors are the mainstay of an adequate and safe blood supply. With the increase in demand for blood products due to loss during delivery, road traffic accidents, new surgical and medical procedures more research should be done to seek new ways to recruit people to donate blood for free.

The limitations of this study are influence from peers and recall bias.

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