

14 June, 2012 – Every year 14th of June is celebrated worldwide as World Blood Donor day. This day was established as an annual event in 2005 by the 58th World Health Assembly. The day is marked by events to raise awareness of the need for safe blood and blood products and thank all those voluntary and unpaid donors around the world for their life saving gift of blood to those in need of it. This year's theme for blood donor day is "Every blood donor is a hero". This year the day is devoted in recognition of unmatched services being rendered by those silent saviors of precious life who donate their blood voluntarily to save another person's life.

Each year World Blood Donor Day is jointly coordinated by four founding partners: the World Health Organization, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the International Federation of Blood Donor Organizations and the International Society of Blood Transfusion. Each year, these partner organizations identify a country to host a global WBDD event that provides a focus for an international media campaign to raise awareness of the critically important role of voluntary blood donors in national health care systems. This year South Korea has been selected to host the launch of this day.

Blood or its products are required either on a regular basis by patients who are suffering from genetic disorders of blood such as Thalassemia or hemophilia. They require blood for their survival throughout their life. We have a large number of thalassemics in Pakistan for whom the best gift is a gift of life in the shape of blood. Conditions such as cancers, accidents, terrorist attacks also need large amounts of blood in order to save the precious lives. In most countries like Pakistan demand regularly outnumbers the supply and blood banking services are in a real challenging position to keep pace with the ever increasing demands.

The World Health Organization recommends and supports the national blood supplies to be achieved through 100% voluntary and unpaid blood donations. In 62 countries of the world, mostly the industrialized nations, blood supplies are from this source. Unfortunately in 42 countries, mostly from third world countries, less than 25% is from voluntary unpaid donors while the majority is from family and replacement donations. In Pakistan this figure is extremely discouraging since our 99% blood donation is from family donors.

Situation in Pakistan

There is no national voluntary blood donation program that could recruit and retain donors. Nearly 98% of blood donations in our country is from family donors giving blood as replacement to the ones transfused to their relatives or friends. This situation needs to be changed by since WHO and its partners discourage this form of donation while encouraging voluntary unpaid donations.

This country has shown great sense of motivation and sacrifice in times of crisis where blood donations were made in excess to the requirement. It is therefore imperative that the national and provincial blood transfusion programs develop their own system and mechanisms of developing programs to encourage and retain voluntary blood donors and keep a regular supply of healthy blood for those in need of it.

What WHO is doing?

WHO is working world wide to support the national and provincial blood transfusion programs in providing them technical support to build systems that could ensure availability of quality assured blood for those in need of it.

In Pakistan it has been working with the national program since its inception on all issues of policy, advocacy, development of standards and protocols, training of health care providers, and monitoring and evaluation. It has recently launched a new project to ensure quality assured screening of all blood that is collected and transfused in the country. The program was launched last year. It has mobilized funds for the procurement of blood screening kits for HIV, Hepatitis B and C worth 7.8 million USD which would be sufficient in providing free blood screening in all blood transfusion centers in the country for next 02 years.

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