

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Obstacles and Answers to Challenges Faced by Transfusion Service - Experience of Regional Blood Center

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The health care system in Pakistan confronts multifarious challenges since there is a marked disparity in the standard of care between public and private health sector, let alone the transfusion services. The foremost obstacle in ensuring safe transfusion and blood bank practices in Pakistan is lower percentage of voluntary blood donors amounting for only 8%. Needless to say, that rest of the 92% donations come from unpaid replacement donors; who are mostly the family members or acquaintance of the recipient in need of blood transfusion. Consequently, the incidence of Transfusion Transmitted Infection is higher when compared to the blood products recruited from voluntary blood donors. Adding to this lamentable situation is non standardized screening methods used by different transfusion laboratories, with few of them relying on ICT method, some on ELISA technique, and a small handful of blood banks are actually doing NAT testing. Non-regulated storage facilities of blood products and inefficient transportation of blood products to the site of transfusion are additional impediments. Concerning data management practices, 26.3% of the blood banks have a Management Information System (MIS), while 73.7% (n = 14) have no MIS and use manual registers [1]. These inconsistent practices have significant potential to compromise patient safety. In this context, there was a dire need to set up a centralized blood banking system in Pakistan with the institution of standardized practice according to local guide-

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lines for the entire process of donor recruitment through the dispensing of blood to various hospital-based blood banks and clinical sites.

Blood transfusion safety reforms were instituted in our country with the help of the German government. Regional blood centers were established as part of the proposed Quality Management System in national reforms in every city of Pakistan. Regional Blood Center (RBC) Karachi was established and opened in October 2019 with the main aim to fade out the unsafe and non-sustainable smaller and medium sized blood banks relying on exchange blood donors along with the very limited blood inventory [2]. Opposed to that, retaining voluntary non remunerated donors and counseling exchange donors to become regular and voluntary donors is one of the key performance indicators for the regional blood center. This document was prepared to share various intermittent and ongoing challenges faced by the RBC and team since the time of its inception.

The lack of commitment and reluctance in potential donor population is one of the major problems, as blood collection still heavily depends upon the replacement donors, although, organizational plans and strategies play a pivotal role in maintaining a well aware and acquainted donor inventory [3]. The regional blood center Karachi built a model to overcome the gaps and reluctance in potential donor community by reaching out during emotional drives on national days and religious occasions. It has been observed that respondents were ready to donate blood without any remuneration in events of national disaster and accidents when requested via phone call or social media. Apart from that, blood donation camps at various educational and corporate setups help meet the demands. Likewise, it is important to establish a bond with volunteer donors through better donor care and giving them public honor by building a positive image of the donor in the public, entrenching their dedication to donate as an act of charity.

Inability to transfer blood units between other Regional centers and private sector Hospitals, where demand is sometimes higher, leads to units expiring on the shelf, mainly platelets. Platelets and plasma products are commonly used to treat hemostasis disorders. The hospitals linked with RBC Karachi under the agreement, mostly do not have sophisticated setups to deal with trauma, burns, and hematological malignancies which consume the major share of prepared platelets and plasma products. Multiple factors make platelet management challenging including ambivalent demands, short expiry, and soaring high cost of single unit platelets [4]. Implementation of a patient blood management program, which encompasses a need based and restrictive transfusion policy, can be a best possible solution for optimizing platelet production and transfusion appropriate according to local guidelines. This will result in low production, lower transfusion rate, and eventually decreased wastage [5].

The biggest remonstrance is faced in form of the struggle to compete with blood banks running with commer-

cial motives. The Regional blood centers' commitment to ethical marketing is likely to switch consumers to avail themselves of its services which are entirely without charge. RBC's focus lies not only with customer benefit but also bears social responsibility.

Retention of positive and motivated professionals is of crucial significance for running the Regional Blood Centers for high quality productivity and consistency of services. Some of the high turnover can be addressed by employee assistance to help address personal nonfinancial issues. In this specific instance, the Human Resource department plays a pivotal role and plans to give health benefit and flexibility of duty hours, which gives a competitive edge over others and alleviates the drive for high turnover. Better management with leadership skills is a prime factor to prevent a toxic work environment and ensure effective communication and deliver required appreciation. Wages are given importance in a developing country like ours, when not increased; it should be made sure that at least they are paid fairly. Another proposed way to value staff is to refine their professional skills with continuous in-house training and certification courses, this will have two-fold benefits for betterment of organization together with personal growth of the staff members.

Limiting additional services to maintain the quality of basic and fundamental services is a strategic concern of RBC. Much focus is laid on effective collaboration between patients and service providers by reparative measures in request processing, sample handling, result interpretation, and availability of emergency services. Moreover, implementation and training of staff to standard operational procedures, policies, and guidelines along with their competency assessment at regular intervals, reduces performer's errors and brings consistency and invariability in outcome.

Remaining vigilant to spot new challenges and obstacles and timely addressing new issues help to improve the quality of overall transfusion services provided by RBC. However, much focus is required in amending the weakened bond between various stakeholders including national, regional, intergovernmental, academia, and public health programs. Conjointly, hand-in-hand, all these creditors can work towards advancement to ensure growth of safe transfusion practices through this communal platform of centralized blood banking.

Declaration of Interest:

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