



Strategies to increase recruitment of voluntary and habitual blood donors*

Estratégias para fidelização de doadores de sangue voluntários e habituais

Estrategias para obtener fidelidad de donadores de sangre voluntarios y habituales

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: To understand the meaning of being a blood donor, to describe fears of blood donors regarding blood donation and organization of blood banks, and identify strategies to increase recruitment of voluntary and habitual blood donors. **Methods:** This was a qualitative exploratory study. Participants consisted of 15 voluntary blood donors from a local blood bank. Data were collected through taped interviews from January 2007 to March 2007. **Results:** Blood donation is a solidarity and life saving act. Motivation to donate blood reflected the donor's personal and human decision. There is a need to inform and educate the population regarding blood donation. Attitude of health care professionals can influence the behaviors of blood donors. **Conclusions:** There is a need to develop communication strategies to reduce fear and to motivate donation of blood. In addition, there is a need to develop a philosophy of care based on humanization to increase recruitment of voluntary and habitual blood donors.

Key words: Blood Donation; Blood donors; Blood Banks.

RESUMO

Objetivos: Detectar a significação do ato de doar sangue e elementos ligados à decisão de tornar-se um doador; conhecer as dúvidas ligadas à doação e opiniões quanto à organização do serviço; identificar estratégias mais eficientes para o desenvolvimento de um programa de doação voluntária e a relevância da relação profissional-usuário na conquista de doadores voluntários e habituais. **Métodos:** Estudo qualitativo de natureza exploratória. Os sujeitos foram 15 doadores voluntários de um banco de sangue. Foram realizadas entrevistas de janeiro a março de 2007, que foram gravadas e transcritas. **Resultados:** A doação é um ato solidário e salvador de vidas; as motivações refletem interesses pessoais e humanitários; deve-se informar e educar a população; a atitude do profissional influencia o comportamento do doador. **Conclusões:** Torna-se indispensável desenvolver uma comunicação para reduzir medos e motivar as pessoas bem como desenvolver uma filosofia de atendimento apoiada na humanização das relações para a fidelização de doadores voluntários.

Descritores: Sangue; Doadores de sangue; Bancos de sangue.

RESUMEN

Objetivos: Detectar el significado del acto de donar sangre y de los elementos ligados a la decisión de tornarse un donador; conocer las dudas ligadas a la donación y opiniones sobre la organización del servicio; identificar estrategias más eficientes para el desarrollo de un programa de donación voluntaria y la relevancia de la relación profesional-usuario en la conquista de donadores voluntarios y habituales. **Métodos:** Estudio cualitativo de naturaleza exploratoria. Los sujetos fueron 15 donadores voluntarios de un banco de sangre. Fueron realizadas entrevistas de enero a marzo de 2007, que fueron grabadas y transcritas. **Resultados:** La donación es un acto solidario y salvador de vidas; las motivaciones reflejan intereses personales y humanitarios; se debe informar y educar a la población; la actitud del profesional influye sobre el comportamiento del donador. **Conclusiones:** es indispensable desarrollar una comunicación para reducir miedos y motivar a las personas así como desarrollar una filosofía de atención apoyada en la humanización de las relaciones para obtener la fidelidad de los donadores voluntarios.

Palabras clave: Sangre; Donadores de sangre; Bancos de sangre.

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INTRODUCTION

The blood donor recruitment is an activity performed to develop programs that aim to create awareness about the importance of the voluntary donation among the population. This work should not only ensure the necessary amount of donors, but also enhance the donations profile, improving the quality standards of the collected and transfused blood⁽¹⁾. Upon this picture, a very common issue for the hemotherapy services is recruiting regular donors, so that service centers always have blood, and the number of last minute donors decreases, for they are not ideal once their health state is not followed up⁽²⁾.

To abandon the old blood collection model, according to which the donor is invited to donate only when someone from their family is in need, is every hemotherapy professional, the government, and the whole society's task⁽³⁾. In order to do so, it is necessary that the hemotherapy services performing the collection are aware that the donor recruitment or the conquest of repetition donors demands that such donors feel safe during the donation process and satisfied with the care process. Therefore, it is important that information surveys about donors' satisfaction level regarding the service provided are performed, so as to raise data that enable actions aiming to increase the number of donors, and specially, satisfied donors⁽⁴⁾.

Moreover, knowing the donors' needs and perceptions, and their behavior regarding blood donation, the blood banks will be able to improve the relationship with donors, enabling an increase in the number of voluntary and safe donations. In other words, the more the institution is able to understand and dominate this environment and the relationships developed in it, the larger its service capacity to the population⁽⁵⁾.

To be successful, a donor service center should know how to perform a good donors' capture, whose key concept is: the client, who can be both a donor and a receptor. Thus, the commitment to the client is, in terms of service quality, an essential factor, for people remember the service more than they do in relation to its product, and this is a process that starts within the company⁽⁶⁾.

Therefore, the theme healthcare services organization and quality services provided to the population gains strategic importance, aiming to create a larger sanitary impact and society legitimacy⁽⁷⁾. Choosing a healthcare model able to help implementing excellent services, based on the human beings involved is essential to gain adherence and regularity.

Such actions aim to establish a link between donors and the service, enabling goals regarding both the quantity and the quality of the available blood to be reached, so as to meet the population's needs. From this perspective, a welcoming approach defined as healthcare model is essential, once the access and welcoming attitude are core

elements in the healthcare services quality assessment, contributing to the users return⁽⁸⁾.

OBJECTIVES

To detect the meaning of blood donation, to identify elements connected to the decision of becoming a blood donor; To know the doubts related to blood donation; to get to know the donors' opinion regarding the work organization in the service provided; To identify which strategies are more efficient in order to develop a more effective voluntary blood donation; To identify the relevance of the professional-user relationship to help conquer regular voluntary donors.

METHODS

The present study has a qualitative character and exploratory nature, and was performed in the Blood Bank of Hospital Santa Casa of Rio Grande. The research subjects were the donors who presented themselves as voluntary (spontaneous/voluntary donor – is the one that donates out of citizenship or solidarity, not linking the donation to a certain patient, and in general, becomes a regular donor, considered a repetition voluntary donor) to the Blood Bank, from January to March 2007, and who met the selection criteria and accepted to participate in the study, totalizing 15 participants (P1, P2, P3...P15). The patients' selection happened according to accessibility and convenience in a sample, oriented by two main criteria: a bond with the institution (of at least 12 months and a minimum of two donations performed in such time range) and availability to give their testimony.

After the clinical and hematological triage, the study purpose and objectives in relation to the service were presented to the donors, and after an explanation and justification of the methodology, an invitation was made and those participating in the study signed the Informed Consent Term. The research was developed within the parameters of Resolution n.º 196/96, of the Conselho Nacional de Saúde (National Health Department), which provides for researches involving human beings. The research project was approved by the Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa da Associação de Caridade Santa Casa do Rio Grande (Committee of Ethics and Research of the Associação de Caridade Santa Casa do Rio Grande), in December, 2006, Legal Opinion no. 041/2006. Finally, semi-structured interviews took place for the data collection, were recorded and transcribed, and the analysis object material was further transcribed. The questions focused on the feelings and thoughts related to the donation, motivations to start and continue donating, assessment of the care provided, professional's attitude influence during care and donor return, and ways to stimulate blood donation.

At first, the interviewees' speech was prioritized as a source of information and a thorough and exhausting

reading of the testimonies was performed as an attempt to capture the meanings, arguments, and justifications present in their speeches. As a second step, results were organized into empirical categories. Further on, the thematic analysis of content was used aiming to qualitatively evidence meanings, arguments and justifications emerging from empirical data and its particularities, articulated to the research objectives and based on studies of the same nature previously talking about the theme⁽⁹⁾.

RESULTS

As of the interviews analysis, data were organized and classified into four categories:

Meaning and behavior upon blood donation

The interviewed donors consider blood donation an act which demonstrates human solidarity and charity. The main meaning and importance given to donating reside in the possibility of saving other lives; lives that need blood:

"The meaning is helping people who need blood" (P4);

"I think: if it can save lives, I'll donate blood..." (P6).

With the donation, they believe a reciprocity feeling is created. In other words, they believe that, if one day they need a blood transfusion, this act will also take place, and other people will donate in their benefit.

"(...) the same way I am helping other people, I may one day need it too, and hope these people can also help me" (P2).

The predominant feelings revealed were satisfaction, well-being, and happiness:

"Oh! I feel good" (P5); *"Well, happy"* (P6); *"Satisfied"* (P8).

The interviewees are aware of the constant need for blood, and the donation act is seen as a selflessness act.

"(...) I think you'd be a very selfish person knowing someone needs a certain blood type that you can donate, and you just don't do it" (P5).

Moreover, it is considered a simple and natural procedure, with little pain.

"It is such a simple thing" (P13); *"It is normal, it doesn't hurt, and it helps many people"* (P9).

The reasons to start and keep donating blood reflect both personal and humanitarian interests. Among the personal interests are listed the day off work and the effects in the donor's health, such as "refining thick blood":

"To have a day off work and to help who needs it" (P1);

"I started because once I went to the doctor and he said I should donate blood because my blood was thick. So, it is good to me" (P12).

On the other hand, those who donate with humanitarian interests do it because they want to help others and know about the importance of such act. Therefore, either it was intrinsic in their nature, or stimulated by other sources, such as advertisements, friends, and/or family:

"I've always wanted to donate" (P4); *"It always occurred due to my initiative. Once I saw a campaign on TV and decided to start donating"* (P13);

"The first time I donated happened due to advice from people who had already donated" (P15).

Assessment of the service organization and care provided to the donor

To a significant amount of the interviewees, the care provided donors is, in general, assessed as good:

"Great! I never had any problems" (P1);

"To me, it has always been great" (P4).

Negative opinions were related to the reception, due to the lack of space and comfort, the time it takes, due to the free demand or some mistake in the service list order:

"I think sometimes the reception takes a little while" (P2).

Some of them mentioned displeasure regarding the collection room, mainly due to lack of ability or accidents during the vein puncture:

"I came here and got a bruise in my arm" (P3).

Strategies to promote the altruistic blood donation

To some of the donors, a possible service center role stimulating the voluntary blood donation is still not clear:

"I actually don't know what they do to get new people to be voluntary donors" (P6).

However, many of the donors believe that the decision of becoming a donor is uniquely linked to one's awareness:

"I think it depends on people becoming aware and coming here" (P2).

In the interviewees' opinion, the low number of

voluntary blood donors is mainly due to the fears and prejudices related to the donation – fear of feeling sick or being contaminated with some disease, the population lack of knowledge and preparation regarding the donation process and the culture, which does not develop this theme socially:

“Because there are a lot of people who are afraid” (P4);

“If I donate blood, I will be contaminated with this or that”(P5);

“I think it comes from culture” (P9).

The interviewees recommended that the population is educated, informed and motivated so that more blood could be donated. They stated that the means to stimulate people to donate blood are spoken and written campaigns, such as brochures, newspapers, and TV and radio campaigns:

“There should be brochures on the streets, to stimulate people, right?” (P3);

“I think more advertisement should be done, on TV, radio” (P11).

The interviewed donors believed some work with young people should be performed, those who need the blood bank and general population, transforming them into not only donors, but also multipliers, stimulating the solidarity feeling:

“I think the younger people should be stimulated” (P4);

“Talking to people, so that they can collaborate and help other people” (P15).

Another suggestion given is that the subject should be divulged in an attempt to touch the emotional and human side of people, demonstrating how important it is for each person to help as much as they can, while they can and are able to:

“I think the subject should be more divulged and there should be an appeal to people’s emotional side, showing the need to help others, (...) while I am able to, I will help” (P13).

Also, the need for a continuous educational work so that a blood donation habit could be established was highlighted, preventing, thus, emergency campaigns with situational donations:

“I think it should be a continuous work (...) not only when someone is sick. Then, somebody goes to your door and asks you to donate blood” (P14).

There are many suggestions regarding times and days

the collection should happen, facilities, space and physical area, however, there are also some suggestions that can facilitate the donors’ return, such as a “reminding” system, that would send notices, invitations, or convocations.

Professional-user relationship and the recruitment of regular donors

To many of the interviewed donors, the professional attitude during the care service is a factor that has great influence on their decision to return to the service center and voluntarily donate again. Moreover, the treatment given to the donor is one of the criteria to assess the service provided:

“For sure, if we are well received and cared for, we will always come back” (P8);

“A good service influences the decision” (P4).

They mentioned that positive attitudes towards the donor are the ones which express, among others, tranquility, patience, affection, attention, sympathy, and good mood. Besides the cordial attitudes, they also considered attitudes that demonstrate education and respect as essential. The positive attitudes are highly valued because they create a safe and relaxed environment, diminishing anxiety and fear upon the blood collection technique:

“Being affectionate, and caring for people” (P6);

“Treating people well” (P10); *“Patience also helps a lot”* (P14).

The subjects also stated that attitudes such as impoliteness, carelessness, bad mood, and lack of sympathy can be responsible for dissatisfaction feelings, and therefore, make it more unlikely for people to go back to the service center:

“Sometimes, not being polite to people or giving them the attention they need” (P8);

“Well, I think treating someone badly when you are in a bad mood” (P10).

DISCUSSION

As to meaning and behavior upon blood donation, the human solidarity and charity presented by the donors in this study is shared by countless other donors in the whole country, as verified by the results of another study performed in Brazil, where 23.1% of the interviewees stated that donating blood is a good act/a love act/a humanitarian act/a charity act/a solidarity act/doing what is right/a good deed⁽¹⁰⁾.

Likewise, the possibility to save lives as the main reason to donate was also found in a study that demonstrates

“that the prevalent knowledge with regard to the regular blood donation importance resides in the guarantee of saving lives”⁽¹¹⁾.

Therefore, donating is connected to solidarity, which is present in the possibility of helping the others and being able to rely on other people’s help in the future, thus creating reciprocity. Such manifestations were also found in North-American citizens’ opinions, whose feelings that trigger the donation act are, among others, compassion, moral obligation, altruism, need of social approval, and expectation of reciprocity. Considering this fact, it is possible to verify that reciprocity is an influent factor in the decision making process of becoming a donor⁽¹²⁾.

The awareness manifestation of a constant need for blood donation, and donating as a selfless act is corroborated by the statement that every blood donation should be altruist, voluntary and non-gratified, either directly or indirectly, as well as anonymity should be guaranteed. Therefore, such perception confirms that blood “is a precious element that depends on a selfless act”⁽¹³⁾.

Due to the fact they are used to the procedure, donors consider donating a simple and natural act, with almost no pain. Corroborating with that statement, a nationwide study verified that 89.3% of its interviewees think that blood donation does not affect the donors’ health⁽¹⁰⁾. This study coincides with another, which took place in Cuba, and revealed that most of the interviewees agreed blood restitutes itself, and volume is quickly recovered, although the quality (cellular part) takes days or months to be reconstituted⁽¹⁴⁾.

The interviewed donors referred to positive feelings for being able to help someone in need with the donation, and due to this fact, they regularly and voluntarily donate blood. Few donors recognized they had any moral or spiritual satisfaction, but when it does exist, it is more frequent in the voluntary group⁽¹⁵⁾.

The well-being presented by the donors is so strong when donating that it is considered a way of helping themselves, becoming a better person, and being sympathetic with other people’s needs. Therefore, “the role altruism has in modern societies may be merged with well-being and human morality policies, mainly due to the fact the citizenship culture diffusion is more and more frequent”⁽¹⁶⁾.

With regard to the reasons to start and continue donating blood, similar results to the ones found in this study are evidenced by a research which presents reasons mentioned as being motivators for the first donation, divided in three categories: reasons focused on the others, reasons focused on one’ self, and external influences. Among the reasons focused on the others, which represent 80% of the data, are solidarity, family need, and collective responsibility. Blood renovation is one of the reasons focused on one’ self, and among the external influences are friends and family’s requests, radio and television campaigns, school campaigns, neighborhood campaigns

and public people’s examples⁽¹¹⁾.

Concerning the service organization and donors’ treatment assessment, a good assessment is confirmed by another study, where most of the population had a positive opinion in relation to blood banks, although there is a minority whose opinion is unfavorable⁽¹⁷⁾. Likewise, when there are negative opinions, these are generally related to unfavorable elements, such as the time a donation takes, the staff’s lack of ability performing the vein puncture, the service disorganization, mistreatment and infrastructure and available equipment limitations⁽¹⁷⁾.

Regarding strategies to promote altruist blood donation, several elements are on the way of developing people’s awareness concerning blood donation, mainly those related to fear, prejudice, doubts, and lack of information. Such manifestations find corroboration in the statements of lack of time, unmotivation, and forgetfulness, as well as the belief one can get contaminated, besides the fear of needles, which are the main difficulties related to donating⁽¹⁸⁾.

The theme exposition in the media is still limited and ineffective, and needs information, motivation, and awareness creating education. In order to do so, it is necessary to “approach themes such as donation benefits and risks, explode myths and beliefs, and inform about the process, the need for blood, the importance of donating, and the blood collected use”⁽¹⁷⁾.

In doing so, the media presents itself as a great ally divulging blood donation. Such manifestations meet the opinion of 23.1% of the interviewees in a Brazilian study⁽¹⁰⁾, who manifested that there should be campaigns so that people donate blood. In the same study, 50.9% of the interviewees say the best mean to transmit messages about blood donation would be the television, and 30.4% of the interviewees say messages to stimulate blood donation should be divulged through folders, brochures, leaflets, and posters⁽¹⁰⁾.

This way, constantly divulging the subject is a good strategy, for, the same way many donors responded to campaigns, many others might as well do it in the future, besides reinforcing the message and reminding those who already donated in the past to do it again. In other words, it would please possible donors to listen to or see more frequent messages about donation due to the fact they would be better informed and more educated, motivated, and aware, because such messages are verified to instigate solidarity, help reduce fear, solve doubts and gain more confidence and security, besides stimulating healthy lifestyles and care with risk conducts⁽¹⁵⁾.

The work with youth should be highlighted, for in this context, youth can be a prevalent factor conquering new voluntary and regular blood donors, especially because most of young people are not impregnated by pre-established ideas present in the Brazilian society regarding blood donation, and as a result, are more receptive to the provided educational actions⁽¹¹⁾.

Moreover, a strategy is divulgation allied to the

emotional and human side of people. In other words, in order to convince someone to donate blood, it is necessary to mention how important it is to save lives and even mention the collective responsibility, besides touching people's sensitiveness through testimonies and experiences, and transmitting that hemotherapy is not a business or commerce⁽¹⁵⁾.

The continuous educational work appears as a way of establishing the habit of donating. Thus, the efforts made should go beyond covering the immediate blood and components needs, in a community and in a certain moment in time, for the objective of blood banks is not only incorporating voluntary donors, but also acquiring repetitive donations, once blood is safer when coming from better informed people who have been submitted to regular laboratory tests⁽¹⁷⁾.

In an attempt to conquer repetition donors, instruments that facilitate the donor's return should be used, such as the notice/convocation system. Therefore, besides giving enough information to the population, the donation should be clearly requested, even if through telephone recruiting programs, correspondence sending, or through special events⁽¹⁵⁾.

In view of the professional-user relationship and the recruitment of habitual donors, a good service contributes to the donors' return and is part of the service assessment criteria. Donors wish to receive a careful and respectful treatment, as well as feel they are valued by the contribution they are performing through the blood donation. Therefore, it is possible to notice donors wish and have to be welcomed with their affection, valorization, recognition, and information needs by the staff providing the service to them. Therefore, the donors' satisfaction should be a constant concern of whoever is providing service and interacting with them, for this is a determining factor in order to achieve regular voluntary blood donors⁽¹⁷⁾.

This way, with regard to welcoming donors, it is interesting to notice that the senses attributed to words are not directly correlated to the health issues, but some of their meanings can be identified as: "attention, consideration, shelter, receiving, providing service to, giving credit to, hearing, admitting, accepting, taking into consideration, offering refuge, protection, or physical comfort, having or receiving someone close to one's self", that is, attributes related to giving health full attention, thus, related to the integrality of healthcare⁽¹⁹⁾.

To the donors, it is important to have a safe environment established, contributing to the diminishing of fear and anxiety present at the donation moment. This way, when providing services to donors, professionals should receive them with sympathy and cordiality, saying their full name, giving them constant attention and assistance, so as to make them feel good and want to return to the service center, becoming a habitual donor. Therefore, it is important to give necessary and enough information about all the procedures adopted, aiming

diminishing anxiety, nervousness, and fear⁽²⁰⁾.

Regarding dissatisfaction, few donors complain about it. In a research performed in Brazil, only 5.7% of the interviewees said they were dissatisfied in their last blood donation. The predominant reason was bad service⁽¹⁰⁾. Upon this picture, in order to conquer a regular clientele, the negative "word of mouth" should be prevented.

In the same research, it was possible to identify that, from the dissatisfied clients, only 4.0% complained. The others (96.0%) did not say anything, however, they will exchange the product or start going to another service center, and will generate negative "word of mouth", transmitting a negative view of the service to other possible clients⁽¹⁰⁾. Therefore, most of the times, the client does not complain, because he/she believes it is not worth it to waste their time with the problem. Besides, they do not know how to file their complaints and believe it would be useless, for the people in the company do not care about him/her or his/her complaints⁽⁶⁾.

Considering the above mentioned, in order to provide services to this population, professionals need to use their interpersonal abilities, which include listening to doubts and complaints, emphasizing the citizenship reflected by the act of donating, excusing fears and being responsible for the creation and information of aware and participative donors⁽⁶⁾. Therefore, it is necessary to implement efficient continuous education programs to instruct people about themes related to the blood and its components safety, including the different stages of the donation process. Additionally, the need for capacitating the whole staff that interacts with donors should be emphasized, mainly with regard to dealing with the public. It is necessary to improve the attention and treatment given to donors⁽¹⁷⁾.

CONCLUSIONS

The information about donors' opinion and feelings are important to the services organization and administration, for they provide knowledge of the attributes considered by them. Such information can be the foundations to the elaboration of a project aiming to educate, mobilize, capture, and recruiting a growing public, leading them to actively participate in the blood donation process, in an aware and responsible way. Welcoming donors, with focus on listening and identifying their needs, enables the information sharing about the user and the identification of aspects that may be interfering in the bonding/regularity of donors, which make follow up actions and service assessment feasible.

As of the data obtained, it is possible to verify that an efficient social communication development is essential, so as to contemplate information and education, aiming to reduce fears, taboos, and fake ideas that may be discouraging many people to become blood donors. In order to do so, it is necessary to elaborate or produce means, material, and messages that will not only inform

and demystify the donation effects, but also awaken generosity, solidarity, and educate about the need for healthy donors, basic principles for the voluntary donation.

Therefore, feelings from both donors and people who are not donors yet should be explored so that blood donation is seen as something from people, to people, and thus, the responsibility for providing such product is a social responsibility. It is also relevant to establish communication spaces with donors, the community, companies, and institutions that support the donation, opening participation space to managers and identifying, in a permanent way, the motivations to not donating and its impact, as well as establishing and maintaining a good relationship with the media and publicity, so as to broadcast the voluntary donation culture, in a clear, correct, and enthusiastic way, through every social segment.

On the other hand, the service needs to develop a donor service philosophy based on the humanization of relationships, aiming to be open and attentive to questions and criticism, besides answering questions correctly, guiding and tranquilizing donors. In summary,

understanding complaints may be a good first step to improve the service. Moreover, it is necessary to develop means through which satisfaction results and indicators could be measured and assessed, so as to allow adjustments to the assistance provided. In this context, it is also very valuable to implement improvements to the aspects that are directly related to the work execution in order to achieve the welcoming environment, such as demand administration, and a better physical space and facilities, providing more comfort and well-being to the users, thus, conquering regularity.

This paper enabled the identification of aspects considered from the users standpoint that should be thought about and internalized by the hemotherapy service centers, so that a welcoming environment can be planned, implemented, and started as a healthcare practice focused on the client, which is the subject-object of every action. Therefore, it is possible to infer that an amplified listening to donors adopted by everyone might, in spite of the limitations present in the service, produce resolving and bond building interventions, based on human values, solidarity, and responsible citizenship values.

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