

Workshop Summary: **Recruiting Blood Donors – Successful Practices**

An FDA sponsored workshop held on the NIH campus July 6 & 7, 2000
<http://www.fda.gov/OHRMS/DOCKETS/AC/00/backgrd/3649b2a.doc>

This two-day workshop was designed for information gathering and sharing. On Thursday we heard concise reports on the theory and practice of recruiting blood donors from successful recruiters. The presenters represented a diverse group of blood centers, both in terms of location and number of collections. On Friday all the attendees had a chance to participate in two of five facilitated discussions on relevant topics: advertising; education; donor retention / satisfaction; incentives; and the top ten actions to recruit and retain donors. Summary slides from the Friday discussion sessions are available at <http://www.fda.gov/cber/summaries.htm>.

There was apparent consensus on many key points:

- Successful programs are multifaceted, drawing on expertise in customer relations, advertising, public relation and, marketing. Such programs exhibit a culture of innovation and hard work.
- The most successful programs have all staff members encouraging and thanking donors.
- Donor recognition is an important component of a successful program. Recognition does not mean providing incentives or gifts to donors. Recognition means acknowledging donors altruistic contribution at each donation, with special recognition at milestones of their donation career such as a public thank-you for multi-gallon donors at a celebration dinner.
- Successful advertising campaigns are keyed to an emotional appeal. They put a human face on the transfusion recipient and the donor. (Pictures of empty blood shelves do not work.)
- Advertising increases awareness, but does not automatically result in more donors. To put a donor in the chair, the donor must be directly asked – preferably one-on-one.
- Corporate campaigns work when there is buy-in and support from top executives. Corporate campaigns can be expanded as corporate leaders challenge other executives to duplicate the program.
- Tele-marketing is an effective recruitment tool when linked to a real-time donor database; that is, the telemarketers have ready access to the most current information about the potential donors.
- Donor education belongs in the school – as early as possible – as part of science and health curricula. Like the corporate campaigns, buy-in from the top (superintendents & principals) is critical.
- Everyone is feeling the financial squeeze – it is difficult to pay for donor recruiting. There were requests for funding for national media and education campaigns.
- Many asked for clearer FDA guidance on acceptable incentives for volunteer donors.

Issues:

- There was no clear consensus on the use of incentives. Despite evidence that incentives discourage long-term repeat donations, most recruiters seem reluctant to give them up. The discussion group on incentives felt they do work. Some states have prohibited incentives (e.g. New York), and blood centers which use no incentives reported success in recruiting donors. Some “incentives,” such as T-shirts, fulfill a second function – free advertising.
- There was no clear consensus on advertising, especially paid advertising. Despite reports of success, many still believe paid advertising is inappropriate and/or unaffordable.
- Many reported struggling with conflict between their donor recruitment and donor operations staff. If the recruiters are successful there is increased stress on the limited resources in donor operations which leads to a decline in donor service and support.
- Several suggested that there should be tax breaks for corporations that sponsor blood programs, but others were skeptical.

The participant appraisals for this workshop were some of the most positive we have seen for an FDA sponsored workshop. Many expressed pleasure that the FDA was showing an interest in donor recruitment and several encouraged us to make this meeting an annual event.

Key points from presentations:

Byran Scully, Director of Community Development, Florida Blood Services, St. Petersburg, FL

- described their move from being an importer of blood to being an exporter (self sufficient since 1994)
- used a broad array of marketing & public relations techniques: a team with a marketing plan, media sponsored & promotional blood drives, patient testimonials, partnerships (sports teams & corporate), incentives (T-shirts are free advertising), tele-recruiting integrated with database marketing
- emphasis on *extraordinary customer service* throughout the entire organization
- emphasis on the “basics of recruitment:” accurate projections, efficient scheduling, relationship building, scheduling 3 months out, etc.
- future plans: CEO campaigns, e-mail recruiting, minority focus groups, advanced recruiter training, web site redesign, etc.

Brian Koski, Consultant, Pittsburgh, PA

- presented insights on donor motivation from Jane Piliavan’s (U. of Wisconsin) research of the late 70s & early 80s
- socialization to a deviant altruistic donor career – collection staff is the primary donor relations arm – “hire personalities & teach technical proficiency”
- explained the donor’s changing needs relative to their career stages – gradual move from extrinsic (1st donation) to intrinsic (≥ 4 donations) motivation – recommended behaviors for encouraging donors at different stages
- emphasized the importance of moving a donor to altruistic motivation – incentives (gifts to donors) discourage long-term altruistic donations – de-emphasize awards and personalize appeals – be person-centered, thanking and encouraging donors at every opportunity

Bill Teague, President & CEO, Gulf Coast Regional Blood Center, Houston, TX

- described their successful TAPS (Teens Are People Savers) program – a program based on focus group information and the charismatic sponsor of the program, Sylvan Miori – the program encourages blood donations by high school students and awards grants to participating high schools (for projects and scholarships) – 177% increase in donations since the 1st year
- described media sponsored (TV & radio) campaigns which resulted in 21% increase over 8 years

W. D. Bill Nielson, Corporate Vice President, Johnson & Johnson, New Brunswick, NJ

- described the successful (28% collections increase over two years) corporate sponsored program “Rx Partners for Life” developed by the HealthCare Institute of New Jersey with support from ABC – further described their plans to build on their success by expanding the program
- hints: small steering committee, with local blood bank match drives to projected times of shortage
- planning now for their third campaign; expanding the campaign nationally based on existing membership – also encouraging new pharmaceutical associations to become involved
- *note:* although not emphasized in Mr. Nielson’s discussion, during Q&A it was revealed that there are costs to the corporation for a donor program including time off the job, recruitment materials, and (often) incentives. There is no tax break to the corporation for these costs.

Keith Warnack, Communications Manager, Puget Sound Blood Center, Seattle, WA

- opened with a primer on teen altruism – interest in moral issues and involvement in pro-social motivated behavior is on the rise among American youth
- described the successful “My Blood / Your Blood” educational program which started in the 1970’s with an NHLBI grant – educated children at all levels, beginning in elementary school – educated a new generation of blood donors

- described plans to update the MB/YB program with support from ABC – hope to be able to market some of the training materials for broad general use – planned premier July 16th – <http://www.mybloodyourblood.org/>
- critical elements: solid science; entertaining; flexible; turnkey

Michael J. Nichol, Director of Donor & Volunteer Management, & **Rob Evans**, Director of Marketing, Canadian Blood Services

- in an energetic tag-team presentation described the history of CBS since taking charge of a fragile blood program in September of 1998 and efforts to first stabilize blood collections & maintain the donor base – & next to increase donations sufficient to counter deferrals linked to vCJD risk (implemented 9/30/99)
- shared the movie, TV and radio spots from their “If you knew . . .” media campaign – a gripping set of advertisements to heighten the awareness of the need for blood donation by subtly reminding the viewer that they may need blood – the campaign was developed with an advertising agency and following extensive focus group research – see <http://www.ifyouknew.com/home.html> – measurable success: 4% increase in awareness of CBS, 47% reported they had seen the ads; 9% increase in collections; 10% increase in new donors; 18% youth; 16% lapsed donors

Suzanne McCombs, Director of Communications & Donor Recruitment, Oklahoma Blood Institute, Oklahoma City, OK

- encouraged everyone to define their blood program on a firm foundation of 1) philosophy, 2) hospital needs, 3) population demographics and 4) geography
- OBI has a self-supply philosophy – a philosophy that has been well accepted and supported by the public in their region – no imports since 1981!
- watch inventory closely – plan to collect at 120% of projected need – an OBI physician becomes involved whenever a single patient uses large amounts of blood
- avoid media appeals because they result in loss of control, disruption of future collections, max-out your resources, customer service degradation, increased cost and the media & public become immune – that said, OBI was forced to use an appeal the week before our workshop (their first in many years)

Jacky Kocz, Executive Director, Community Blood Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania, Erie, PA

- their blood center is a demonstration that encouraging altruistic donation without incentives works
- explained the need to *motivate* blood donors to donate, the need to *facilitate* the actual donation process, and to *maintain* the donor’s behavior
- described a staff permeated with a caring and encouraging attitude – a “thank you” culture – they focus on behaviors which will maintain the regular blood donor
- their focus group research confirmed that donors do not want incentives – just recognition

Jill Scolamiero, Director of Allogeneic Production and **Mark Thornhill**, Director of Donor Services, ARC Blood Services, New York-Penn Region, West Henrietta, NY

- described their success in moving from blood importer to exporter – 24% increase in four years – a comprehensive program led by involved managers in a flat hierarchy that encourages ownership of the process by everyone – they reported on a careful and systematic application of management tools backed up by routinely collected, accurate, readily available information (DAISY – Donor Services Automated Information System)
- explained the LifeShare campaign – a model of “*fair share values*” used to determine donation goals for companies that agree to host blood drives (approximately 250 donors per 1,000 employees)
- shared their aggressive plans for continued growth in donor collections at the same or increased efficiency