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American Red Cross

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ARC Northern California Region

Red Cross Announces New Blood Donor Recruitment Plan

Over the course of 2000, the availability of the nation's blood supply was threatened by severe weather, one of the most severe flu seasons in recent history and the emergence of a new, possibly blood-borne disease: variant Creutzfeldt Jacob disease (vCJD), the human equivalent to "mad cow disease". The American Red Cross, which collects nearly half of the nation's blood supply, faced an additional challenge when it implemented a more sensitive screening test to detect safe levels of iron in a donor's blood. These obstacles combined to produce two very severe blood shortages that year, but numerous appeals by the Red Cross and other independent blood centers convinced people of the need to raise the levels of a dangerously low blood supply.

Now, in 2001, the blood banking community is facing another blood availability challenge: an expanded blood donor deferral for people who have spent a significant amount of time in the European countries where vCJD and BSE (the form of "mad cow" disease that affects cattle) are prevalent. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is considering an expanded vCJD deferral for all blood centers but has not yet made a decision.

At a recent meeting of an advisory committee to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Red Cross introduced a new strategy to prevent future blood shortages and ensure a continuously available blood supply. According to Jacquelyn Fredrick, senior vice president for American Red Cross Biomedical Services, the multi-faceted plan, which involves expanded recruitment initiatives, publicity campaigns and other strategies, will address the "human element" of blood availability.

"The safety of the blood supply is the number-one priority of the Red Cross, and through our national system we continue to strengthen the infrastructure to ensure safety. A similar investment is now needed to ensure availability — we are facing an increased demand for blood, coupled with challenging new threats to blood safety, such as vCJD," said Fredrick. "It will take a major investment of time, money, expertise and resources to make the American public aware of the need for a new generation of blood donors."

The Red Cross plans to tackle the issue of blood availability by changing from a supply-driven to a need-driven blood collection model. Fredrick said that historically, the Red Cross and other blood centers have focused on recruiting as many donors as possible to ward off potential shortages. Under the Red Cross system, each regional blood center (there are 36 nationwide) collects as much blood as possible in that area and most of the blood is used in local hospitals.

But recently, this model has resulted in cyclical and seasonal patterns of blood shortages, both nationally and regionally, during times when the current, slim donor base is reduced. For example, the most severe national shortages tend to occur during the summer months, when high school and college students — a large donor population during the academic year — are on vacation. Severe winter weather, especially in the Northeast and Midwest, contributes to frequent, localized shortages. Because the Red Cross maintains a national inventory, blood products can be shipped from one area to another in cases of major shortages, but Fredrick said an ideal collection system would be one that made shortages less common overall.

Implementing a need-driven model of blood collection, said Fredrick, will allow the Red Cross to use projected patient needs to ensure an adequate supply of blood products whenever and wherever they are needed. The organization is currently in the process of instituting a national system that will maintain a continuous, real-time flow of information regarding both daily blood collections and individual hospital needs. "Combining inventory and need data will enable the Red Cross to plan for and pinpoint where specific blood products are needed and where potential shortages may occur," said Fredrick.

*Written by Becky Orfinger, Staff Writer,
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American Red Cross Announces New Deferral Policy

May 22, 2001— Beginning mid-September, the American Red Cross will implement a prudent and cautious deferral policy due to the spread of variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD), the human form of “mad cow” disease. This always fatal disease has spread from the United Kingdom to other countries in Europe. There is enormous scientific uncertainty, no blood test and a long latency period (5 to 10 years) before the disease can be detected. There are no known

cases of transmission through human blood transfusion, but animal models have shown it is possible to transmit vCJD through blood.

Beginning mid-September, the following people will be restricted from giving blood to the Red Cross:

- Anyone who has lived in the United Kingdom for a cumulative total of **three months** since 1980 *or*
- Anyone who has lived in any European country or combination of countries (including the United Kingdom) for a cumulative total of **six months** since 1980 *or*
- Anyone who has received a blood transfusion in the United Kingdom since 1980



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