

WHO GETS TRANSFUSED RED CELLS? BLOODHOUND ON THE TRAIL!

Transfusion Fact Sheet Volume 2, Number 1
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What do red cells do?

Oxygen is vital to the body's basic metabolic processes. Red cells transport oxygen to the cells bound to a molecule called haemoglobin. A low level of red cells is called anaemia.

What does being anaemic feel like?

An anaemic person can feel tired and lacks energy because there is simply not enough oxygen available to provide energy for normal body functioning. They may be breathless or feel light-headed when they stand up.

Why might people be anaemic?

There are two basic reasons why someone may be anaemic, the patient is:

- not making enough red cells, because of problems with the bone marrow or through a lack of essential vitamins or iron in the diet; or
- losing blood faster than making it.

When does someone get a red cell transfusion?

Transfusion is only appropriate for moderate to severe anaemia. The decision to give a red cell transfusion will depend on whether the person is actively bleeding, how severe the symptoms are and how low the haemoglobin is. The doctor will also decide how many units of red cells are needed, how soon and how quickly they are to be given.

What is Bloodhound?

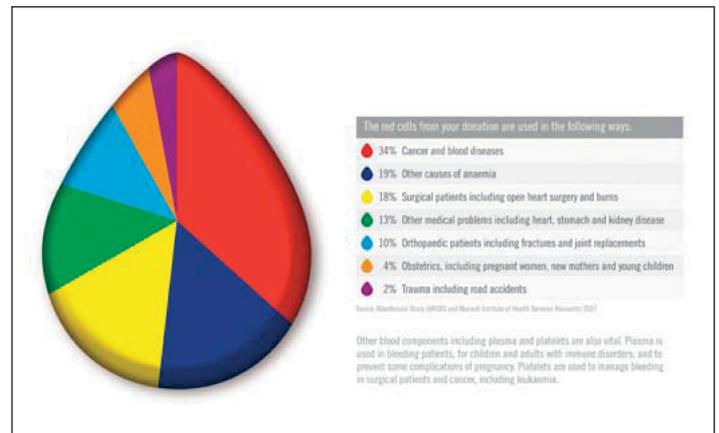
In 2007, the Blood Service in Victoria undertook the Bloodhound study to better understand why red cells were being transfused and how urgently they were required.

How did Bloodhound find out about red cell use?

5,132 red cell packs were tagged with a questionnaire during production at the Blood Service. Victorian hospital laboratories were asked to tell us what type of patient received the red cells and how urgently they needed them.

What did Bloodhound find out?

The blood drop above tells us what type of patients received red cell transfusions. About one third of all red cell transfusions were given to patients with cancer and blood diseases such as leukaemia and thalassaemia, approximately one third were



used for surgical patients and approximately one third were used for other causes of anaemia including patients with other medical conditions such as heart, stomach and kidney disease. Bloodhound also found that most red cells were needed quite urgently, with 53 percent of transfusions required within 24 hours of the request.

Why does it matter?

The Blood Service can use the information for supply and contingency planning. The data are also being used to tell donors how their donation is being used to save and improve the quality of people's lives.

BLOOD FACT

Iron deficiency anaemia is the most common blood disorder in the world.