

Blood Donation Programs of Davao City: Bases for a Policy Ordinance

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ABSTRACT

In the past, the immediate need for blood in Asia was so urgent that authorities set up systems that quickly resulted in the establishment of commercial blood donor systems which however provided sub-optimally safe blood. Today many families, who are in dire need of blood, recruit blood donors for their patients in an effort to meet the blood requirements resulting to friends and relatives being under pressure at the requests. There are people who are recruited financially and they appear to be very much like commercial donors. These systems are still perpetuated in many hospitals today. In Davao City various private service-oriented organizations, concerned with the need for safe and adequate supply of blood, conduct their own blood-letting activities, or collaborate with the Philippine National Red Cross. Potential donors, schools and colleges do their share though hardly being institutionalized. Many barangays, however, have not given the right attention and importance to voluntary blood-letting activities. The study gathered data on the prevailing programs on blood donation of the Philippine National Red Cross (Davao City Chapter); civic organizations like the Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, etc.; the Davao City Health Office; the academe; and the barangays. Documentary analyses were done to establish a picture of the blood demand and supply of Davao City. Many roadblocks are seen. Foremost is the lack of a policy program to synchronize these blood donation programs. The researchers opt to balance all options and come up with the proposed Barangay Blood Donors Ordinance aimed to reinforce Republic Act 7719 otherwise known as the Blood Services Act of 1994. The proposed ordinance will be submitted for first reading to the 15th Regular Council Session of the Davao City Sangguniang Panlungsod before the end of July, 2008 by the City Councilor Pilar C. Braga, who also commissioned the study.

Keywords: Blood Donation Program, Blood Supply

INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that of the estimated 80 million units of blood donated annually worldwide, only 38 percent are collected in the developing world where 82 percent of the world's population lives. It also reported that

collection of blood from nonremunerated, voluntary blood donors is still globally recognized as the ideal method in support of assuring safety of blood and blood components (Promotion of Voluntary..., 2003).

In 2007, an estimated 2.5 million units of donated blood with a total cost of US\$214 million were discarded after testing positive for infectious diseases. This incident proves that far fewer units would have been discarded if the blood had been collected only from well-selected, voluntary non-remunerated blood donors who are less likely to acquire transfusion-transmissible infections than paid donors or family/replacement donors.

The situation is similarly alarming in the Philippines because intensive information, education and communication campaign is needed to encourage people to be regular blood donors (Rodriguez del Pozo, 1994). They also need to know and understand that aside from being healthy, it is a humanitarian act and a community responsibility. Only three to four percent of Filipinos regularly donate blood while the country's annual blood requirement is about 700,000 to 750,000 blood units or a daily collection of 2,232 blood units to ensure the adequacy of blood supply (PNRC-DC, 2007).

The goal of the Department of Health (DOH) by 2010 is to establish a completely voluntary, safe, adequate, appropriate and efficient blood transfusion service in the country (PNRC-DC, 2007). The department has envisioned collecting community-based blood donations and conduct centralized testing for any diseases and will be the sole supplier to all government-owned and private hospitals.

Southern Mindanao, including Davao City, despite being declared as No.1 in 2007 for the most number of blood donations, still lacks 4,000 units less than the ideal mark. The Philippine National Red Cross Davao City Chapter reported that the average collected units available per day from collected blood donations shows a shortfall of more than half (PNRC-DC, 2007). The startling reality points out that Davao City suffers from lack of blood supply and less people are donating blood due to misconceptions and fears (Mendoza & Vergel, 2000). Barangays in Davao City have been a good source of blood supply but still the shortage of blood supply is increasing every year and many people have very low awareness of the importance of voluntary and unpaid but safe blood donation. Added to this is the fact that blood letting activities in the city are not synchronized.

Concerned with these conditions and driven by the desire to craft a research-based policy ordinance to institutionalize blood donation programs in the city, Councilor Pilar C. Braga of the Davao City 15th Regular City Council, commissioned the study which was conducted from February 2007 to May 2008.

OBJECTIVES

The study was pursued in view of the prevailing need of the city to have a steady and adequate supply of safe blood from unpaid, voluntary donors. The study gathered data on the prevailing or existing blood donation programs of Davao City. Documentary analyses were also done to establish the blood demand and the actual blood supply of Davao City.

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To describe and characterize the various blood donation programs currently conducted in the city;
2. To identify problems or roadblocks to achieving satisfactory voluntary blood donor service in the local community;
3. To explore effective ways of attracting and retaining blood donors; and
4. To identify strategies to encourage blood donation and increase safe and adequate supply of blood and donors as bases for a policy ordinance.

METHODS

Respondents of the study consisted of key officials of NGO, civic and service oriented organizations (12); community extension officers of industrial and manufacturing companies (10); retailing corporations (6); schools, colleges and universities (5); and barangays (60).

The study used documentary analysis and a mixture of consultative dialogues, focus group discussions and interviews (formal, informal and in-depth) to identify problems and gather recommendations to strengthen voluntary blood donation programs of the city. The documents analyzed consisted of the following: various types of reports, manuals, and brochures. The following were the interview questions used:

- 1) Do you have blood-letting/blood donation programs? When? How regular?
- 2) What problems do you have in relation to blood donation programs?
- 3) What measures have you done to solve these problems?
- 4) How do you attract/encourage blood donors? Who are these blood donors?
- 5) What do you recommend so that the city may have adequate supply of safe blood?

Responses to Question No. 1 were tabulated and analyzed using frequency and ranking. Since Questions No. 2 to 5 required qualitative responses, the responses were analyzed using thematic analysis and the most dominant perspectives were presented.

RESULTS

Description of blood donation programs. Private civic and service-oriented organizations (such as Lions, Rotary, Kiwanis, Soroptimist, Jaycees, YWCA and YMCA); industrial, manufacturing, utility providers, and retailing corporations (Lapanday, Alcantara, Davao Light & Power Co., Davao City Water District, Soriano, NCCC); have been conducting regular blood-letting or blood donation activities in collaboration with the Philippine National Red Cross as part of their annual activity to promote their corporate vision and community outreach program. Schools, colleges and universities; church-based organizations; and other private organizations conduct their blood donation activities as part of their institutional thrust for community extension work. These are conducted, however, in a sporadic and intermittent fashion and not institutionalized as a regular activity. Only very few of the barangays have an annual blood letting or blood donation activity. The activity would depend on the barangay leadership.

Identified problems (roadblocks) to blood donations. Davao City, despite being declared as No.1 last year for the most number of blood donations, still lacks 10,000 units less than the ideal mark. The Davao City Chapter of the Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC) collects an average of 31 units daily against the demand of 81 units. The PNRC caters to most local blood needs while the City Blood Center (of the Dept. of Health) prioritizes national requests for blood supply.

Only few donors come from the barangay considered as the richest source of blood donors. Most of the blood donations come from unremunerated, voluntary donors.

There is absence of a policy program of the city to synchronize blood donation programs which are frequently done by civic organizations, some people's organizations and sporadic outreaches by the barangays. Private organizations and even some government agencies articulated the need for an overall policy or guideline to synchronize all blood donation activities in the city.

There is low awareness and lack of appreciation of people for blood donation, safe blood and ignorance of national policies on blood transfusion.

Most private organizations have observed that there is low interest of the local government to pursue programs of regular blood donation (since it is always reasoned out that the Philippine National Red Cross is the lead agency for this effort).

Provision for basic funding is non-existent. Although the Philippine National Red Cross is a government entity, it relies mainly on donations and voluntary contributions. Private organizations fund their own blood donation services.

Ways of attracting and retaining blood donors. Civic and service oriented organizations rely mostly on their own members and family for blood donation. The blood donation activities are usually tied up with various internal celebrations of the organizations (such as foundation days, fiestas, etc.). Industrial, manufacturing and retailing corporations due to sheer number of employees have little difficulty in attracting blood donors. Blood-letting activities are part of their community outreach program or integral to their corporate social responsibility. Free groceries and rice, performance incentives, credit for extension work, a day off – these are the most common ways of attracting blood donors. Schools, colleges and other non-government agencies use information, education and communication means to attract donors. Some barangays of the city give out free rice and health incentives. Most private organizations have found out that the two (2) most effective ways of attracting blood donors is by educating them so that they can respond positively and by appealing to the heart and altruistic motive of the donor.

Strategies to encourage blood donation and increase safe and adequate supply of blood and donors. The most common strategies pinpointed to encourage blood donation are education of prospective blood donors, giving of incentives of various kinds, and appealing to the altruistic motive of the donor. The younger population is considered more impressionable and at low risk (Rogrig, 2000). At present, there are no existing programs to educate and motivate this segment of the population. By educating them, they not only commence donating blood regularly, but also become motivators for other members of the community. Private organizations have put in place various information and orientation programs to elevate awareness of various sectors of the community towards blood donation. The barangay is a rich source of blood supply. There is absence of policy to tap this potential source. The Philippine National Red Cross, together with the Department of Health, regularly conducts orientation programs on blood donation. There is a PNRD Blood Donor Card for regular blood donors. The City government conducts intermittent blood-letting or blood donation activities and has no clear promotional activities to encourage blood donation among the thousands of its employees.

DISCUSSIONS

The blood letting or blood donation programs of the various organizations endeavor to recruit donors and motivate them to donate regularly. Such regular donors constitute a pool of motivated low risk donors and can be called upon in emergency situations to respond to various needs. These organizations, especially the Philippine National Red Cross, have a database of these donors comprising of their correct and complete address, blood group and donor's preferences for donation. These are maintained for purposes of confidentiality of this database. The local government can learn from this procedural management of keeping blood donors' database.

The blood donation program of the Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC) has an active feedback mechanism from the donors. A system for acknowledging errors, investigating and correcting these and making necessary correction to prevent their occurrence have been instituted. This has augmented credibility of the donor program and assists in improvement in services.

The Philippine National Red Cross Davao Chapter caters mostly to the local blood needs of Davao City and the region. For PNRC Blood Card-bearing individuals, accessing blood for their personal need is mostly and oftentimes free. But for those without PNRC card, accessing blood is very difficult; hence they bring along qualified family donors or would look for outside donors. This practice entails financial requirement (around Php 900). The City Blood Center (of the Department of Health) prioritizes national requests for blood donation and oftentimes, advice requests for blood supply to be channeled to the PNRC.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can play a vital role in galvanizing the community and motivating the donors. They can also provide considerable support in organizing mobile camps. Such organizations should be identified and encouraged to cooperate with blood transfusion services to contribute in donor management program. Similarly, big corporate and business companies can be approached to provide a variety of support in donor management program. At present, private organizations, corporate and manufacturing firms have their individual blood donation programs. The ideal would be to have a synchronized blood donation program of the entire city participated by government, non-government and private individuals.

Voluntary blood donation from the low risk population requires identification of such population and motivating them to donate blood regularly. Younger population is considered more impressionable and at low risk. Special strategies and programs need to be developed to educate and motivate this population, so that they not only commence donating blood regularly, but also become motivators for other members of the community. Apart from conventional methods of imparting education and creating awareness among the public, active cooperation of various media - both electronic and print versions can boost the program (Allessandrini, 2006). Various communication strategies and methodologies are available and must be utilized effectively in educating the potential target population about the utility of voluntary blood donation.

Mendoza and Vergel (2000) supported the idea that blood donation should be a purely voluntary act. According to them, most people believed that it may be one of the primary duties of each citizen to give blood, but making the act a requirement by the government is not acceptable to most. The government should push for a campaign strategy that promotes self-altruism while creating a sense of both pride and patriotism in

the act of donating blood, but at the same time, avoiding even a slightest hint at “requiring” adults to give blood. Hence, this study proposes that an ideal policy would be to institutionalize blood donation in every barangay of the city which means holding an annual celebration of a Barangay Blood Donors Month with the voluntary blood donation and an education component as centerpieces of the celebration.

CONCLUSIONS

Blood donation programs conducted in Davao City are sporadic, intermittent and not institutionalized. Except for the Philippine National Red Cross, most of these blood letting activities are not regular and for most occasions, are conducted in conjunction with institutional celebrations.

Blood supply for the City of Davao is very low. All blood supply gathered or recruited by private organizations from blood donors are officially endorsed to the Philippine National Red Cross. The Davao City Chapter of the Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC) collects an average of 31 units daily against the demand of 81 units.

There is absence of policy program of the city to institutionalize blood donation. A policy program is seen as a response to the articulated need for an overall policy or guideline to synchronize all blood donation activities in the city.

Most residents of the community have low understanding and lack of appreciation for blood donation. This one reason for the prevailing low turn-out of blood donors.

The barangay is a potentially rich source of blood donors especially those belonging to the younger generation.

Most often blood donation is motivated by altruistic, humanitarian and health motives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Generally, the study recommends three broad mainstreams that could either be pursued separately or in combination:

The City should synchronize all existing blood donation programs of various civic, industrial, manufacturing and private organizations in the city;

Intensify blood letting activities along with blood donation orientation programs to result in more blood supply and increase blood donors; and

Design a program to institutionalize blood donation activities in the Barangay; this program could be made the main feature of a proposed policy ordinance. The proposed ordinance will 1) promote and encourage voluntary blood donation by the citizenry and instill public consciousness of the principle that blood donation is a humanitarian act; 2) institutionalize a barangay blood donation program as a tool to provide, adequate, safe, affordable and equitable distribution of supply of blood and blood products; 3) introduce and implement an information, education and communication (IEC) component of the ordinance to sustain voluntary participation of the community in blood donation. The proposed ordinance will institutionalize the celebration of the Barangay Blood Donor Month in every barangay of the city where the main focus is the blood-letting activity and the education of the barangay residents.

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