Is Blood Donation an Opportunity for Hypertension Awareness?

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Our study seeks to determine:

1. How many donors fall within the pre-hypertensive or hypertensive blood pressure range based on their reading at the time of donation.

2. How many at-risk donors are not aware of these hypertensive or pre-hypertensive readings.

3. Whether blood centers can effectively provide blood pressure education by means of an informational pamphlet.

**Introduction**

- Blood centers serve as a cornerstone of public health by providing potentially lifesaving blood products. Interactions with millions of potential donors provides these centers with a unique means of health education and screening opportunities.

- Hypertension screening is one potentially feasible option in these centers. Hypertension, a modifiable risk factor affecting one in three adults, contributes to nearly half of all cardiovascular disease related deaths in the U.S. 14.1 million U.S. adults are unaware of their hypertension, which has designated this disease “the silent killer.”

- Blood pressure screening is required in the United States for the donation of blood. Many hypertensive donors, even those who are deferred for this reason, are never educated on the meaning of their blood pressure results.

- Numerous studies have evaluated the efficacy of blood centers in screening populations for risk factors ranging from hyperlipidemia and hyperglycemia to genetic diseases.

**Methods**

- 1200 voluntary and anonymous 25-question surveys were distributed to presenting blood donors through the Red Cross in VT and NH and collected from 10/10/12 to 10/26/12.

- Deferred donors could still participate in the study.

- Participants first answered twenty-two questions, then read an informational pamphlet about hypertension. Three additional questions were asked regarding the utility of this handout.

- Prehypertension/hypertension was defined as having either a diastolic or systolic blood pressure measurement falling into the respective range.

- Data was double-entered into Microsoft Excel 2010 and crosschecked for accuracy.

- Descriptive statistical analysis was done using SPSS.

**Results**

- 45% of donors with a hypertensive reading at blood donation had never been told they have hypertension by a healthcare provider.

- A majority of donors thought the pamphlet on high blood pressure was valuable.

**Conclusions**

- Based on these findings, we conclude that there is an opportunity for increasing hypertension awareness at the time of blood donation.

- Within the highest risk group, those reporting a hypertensive blood pressure, almost half of them had not ever been told they had hypertension.

- In addition, the surveyed donors largely felt that the pamphlet of educational material about hypertension was valuable and were at least somewhat likely to use that information to make lifestyle changes.

- These findings suggest that increasing hypertension awareness as part of a blood donation screening is not only needed, but useful as a public health measure.

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**References**