Opportunities and Challenges for Mainstreaming Psychosocial Care and Support in Health Prevention Interventions: Experiences from a Blood Donor Recruitment Program in South Western Uganda

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Format of Presentation

Today’s presentation will include:

• Background
• Project description
• Lessons learned and challenges
• Conclusion and next steps
Background

• World wide, blood donation is an indispensable aspect of the health care system

• Blood donation saves millions of lives each year in both routine & emergency situations

• Patients who require transfusion as part of their clinical management have the right to expect that sufficient & safe blood will be available

• However, many patients in Sub-Saharan Africa including children still die or suffer unnecessarily because they do not have access to safe blood (WHO, 2010)
In Uganda, 50% of all donated blood is used among children with severe anemia, largely due to malaria, intestinal worm infestation & malnutrition (UBTS, 2010).
Background (continued)

• Thus, to enhance the well being of children who may require blood transfusion, safe & sufficient blood & blood products should be available at all times.

• This requires an efficient and effective blood donor recruitment system

• In Uganda, blood donor recruitment programme is run by both Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS) & Uganda Blood Transfusion Services (UBTS)
• In South Western Uganda, there are four blood collection teams operating in 15 Districts. They make up Mbarara Regional Blood Bank (MRBB)

• MRBB targets 3,960 units of blood per month to supply 27 blood transfusing health units in the region

• In other countries like the Netherlands, majority of royal blood donors are above the age of 45 years
Background (continued)

• In Uganda, majority (90%) of blood donors are secondary school students aged between 17 and 19 years

• This category of blood donors is in a unique stage of development associated with varying PSS needs

• Working with this age-group is an opportunity to meet their psycho-social care and support needs but it can also be challenging
Project Description

• Blood donation program is responsible for not only ensuring availability of adequate & safe units of blood but also protecting the health, safety & well being of its blood donors

• Thus, the program is based on a service oriented culture with quality systems & professionally trained & donor focused staff

• The program focuses on providing quality donor services & care
Blood Donor services & care

1. Provision of blood donor counseling

• Blood donors are counseled on how to maintain a healthy lifestyle & avoid future risky behaviors

• Deferred donors are informed of the reasons for their deferral. Blood donors who are temporarily or permanently deferred from donating blood are supported to deal with negative feelings of deferral

• Blood donors at risk of acquiring transfusion transmissible infections (TTIs) are given information about infections, how they are prevented, transmitted, the implications for their health & opportunities for treatment
Blood Donor services & care

(2) Referral Services

• Deferred donors are referred for further investigation, treatment & support
• Seropositive donors are referred & linked to specialist clinical services and social support organization

(3) Material support - specifically, provision of iron tablets to blood donors whose hemoglobin levels are low

(4) Training of blood donors

• Life skills
• Community mobilization
• Sensitization for health promotion
• Peer – to-peer counseling

(5) Sensitization of blood donors

• Living a healthy lifestyle
• Prevention of transfusion transmissible infections
A sensitization Session at a Nursing School about prevention of TTIs
Donor care (continued)

(6) Launch of Club 25
• Club 25 was launched in Uganda in 2011 to enhance availability of safe blood throughout the year

• The club encourages young people (17-25) to donate blood regularly & commit to adopting a healthy life style

(7) Training of URCS/UBTS staff in blood donor care skills

• To ensure blood donor satisfaction, 32 URCS/UBTS staffs involved in blood donor recruitment in Mbarara Regional Blood Bank were trained in blood donor care skills

• The blood donation team is multidisciplinary comprising of social workers, nurses, counselors, social marketers and educators
Lessons Learnt & Challenges

• Belonging to club 25 provides adolescent donors with peer support.

• Peer support has facilitated adolescent donors maintain a healthy lifestyle

• Self-identity as life savers, enhances adolescent donors’ self esteem, a sense of belonging, feelings of altruism & a sense of social responsibility
A Sense of identity
Membership to such a club gives a donor a sense of belonging. They access peer support, participate in club activities & enhance their wellbeing.
Club Members reading brochures about living a healthy lifestyle
Lessons Learnt & Challenges (continued)

• A multi-disciplinary approach in health intervention provides an opportunity to meet varying needs of young people.

• A strong relationship between the staff and blood donors enables adolescent donors to openly express their realities, talk about their experiences, thoughts & feelings related to their lives and health.

• Deferred blood donors often experience fear about their health, a sense of rejection & disappointment. A skilled donor care team supports donors to deal with negative feelings.

• Adolescent donors are so anxious about physical, psychological, social & emotional changes that take place in their life. It takes great skills & understanding to support them.
Lessons Learnt & Challenges (continued)

• PSS is not well understood &/or appreciated in blood donor recruitment program; e.g. there has been a debate about the relevance of post donation counseling activities in blood donor recruitment program

• Sustainability- The program is run on donor funds (PEPFAR). This has implications on sustainability of the program especially donor care activities

• The process of making a safe unit of blood available for transfusion is very expensive. It costs about 45 US dollars.

• The blood donor recruitment program has a weak societal interface
Some Illustrative stories

• “Now that I am safe, I will stay safe unless I drink HIV from water” A 19 years old male donor after counseling

• “I am grateful that you brought back our results. I have been very worried. Every morning after bathing, my whole body itches & I had many questions. It’s good you’ve answered my questions”
  A female blood donor after post donation counseling

• “It is good to hear that I am safe. You can see my face; because of pimples, the whole school including teachers thinks that I am sick. They back bite me; they don’t want to associate with me. In fact, I had also started to believe that may be I am sick even if I have never had sex”
  A male adolescent blood donor after post donation counseling
Illustrative stories (continued)

• “I am poor but mobilizing for blood donation has enhanced my status in this community. Everyone knows me and they respect me now. Even other organizations come looking for me. I am an important person now.

  *Out of School adolescent*

• “In senior three A, we have formed a discussion group of blood donors. I am not so good in mathematics but this group has helped me improve”

  *A 17 year old female blood donor*

• “Your counseling services fill a big gap in this school. We don’t have counselors here in school. When you visit & sensitize these students, we take some time without recording some bad cases” *Director of studies*
Conclusions

• Agencies engaged in health interventions need to adopt a multi-disciplinary approach to effectively address PSS needs of adolescents

• A strong relationship between adolescents and health intervention agencies is a premise for effective PSS

• Building the capacity of individuals involved in provision of PSS is vital for effective service delivery
May I take this opportunity to challenge each one of us who has no reason to doubt the Safety of their blood to pass by Kenya Blood Transfusion Services & donate a unit of blood. In so doing, each one of us will save the lives of at least three children. Then, we shall walk the talk of PSS to all children.

Thank You
Resources

(1) Mbarara Regional Blood Bank Annual Report 2012

(2) Uganda Blood Transfusion Services Strategic Plan 2010-2015

(3) World Health Organization (2010): Towards 100 voluntary blood donation

(4) www.who.int/feature/factfiles/blood-transfusion/en/
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