

China and uae make rapid progress To safe blood donation

Medicine

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China and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have made impressive strides in tackling the risk of contamination from unsafe blood by reaching close to 100% voluntary blood donation , said the World Health Organization today . Their efforts to increase their safe blood base will be promoted as models for other countries to follow on the occasion of World Blood Donor Day, on 14 June.

Compared to 1998, when systems of paid donations or donations from family members made up 80% of its blood supplies, China has achieved 98.5% voluntary donations in just 10 years. The UAE went from 0% of voluntary donations in 1990 to 80% in 2004 and 97.6% in 2006.

"Access to safe blood is a key component of effective health care and voluntary donors are the cornerstone of a safe blood supply," said Carissa Etienne, Assistant Director-General for Health Systems at the World Health Organization (WHO). "Available, safe blood is particularly crucial to the health of women and children."

WHO's most recent figures on blood donation show that only 54 countries globally have achieved 100% voluntary donation, including, most recently, Thailand, Turkey and Uganda.

Studies reveal that some governments perceive the task of mobilizing the population to donate blood without payment or family interest as insurmountable. But China and the UAE have shown that it is possible to change donor behaviour in a very short time.

"Thanks to the strong commitment of the Government and extensive national and local campaigns, a huge shift occurred in the way Chinese people think about blood donation," said Peter Carolan, Senior Officer at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. "That shift became even more apparent last month, when thousands of people queued up all over the country to give blood to help the Sichuan earthquake victims."

To thank regular voluntary donors, China will award the very first gold medals - called 'medals for life' - this year to donors who have reached the 20 voluntary blood donations mark. Replicas of the medals in the form of lapel pins will be given to voluntary donors who give blood from World Blood Donor Day, on 14 June, to the beginning of the Olympic Games.

The UAE was the first country in the region to stop importing blood in 1984, after the discovery of HIV/AIDS. In 1990, the Government established a national blood transfusion programme and took legislative and policy measures to move to a system of 100% voluntary unpaid blood donation.

These rapid strides were made possible by creating an enabling political environment, fostering a culture of voluntary blood donation, using media and other channels to raise awareness, building a

stable blood donor pool and providing quality care for donor health and safety.

"The UAE has clearly demonstrated the power of political commitment and community involvement and sets an example we hope other countries will follow," said Neelam Dhingra, Coordinator of Blood Transfusion Safety at WHO.

Less than 45% of the global blood supply is collected in developing and transitional countries which are home to about 80% of the world's population. These countries bear the world's heaviest burden of disease and therefore need an adequate and safe supply of blood and blood products, particularly for life-threatening conditions such as severe anaemia in children due to malaria and poor nutrition, and haemorrhage and other pregnancy-related complications in women.

Voluntary blood donors are the safest source of blood. They donate of their own free will, without pressure, coercion or payment, and are therefore less likely to hide information about their health status and behaviour that may make them ineligible to donate blood. Regular voluntary donation guarantees a sufficient and sustainable blood supply. Progress to 100% voluntary blood donation shifts the burden of arranging blood for transfusion by a patient or family to the health care system.