EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

Worldwide Policies on Haemochromatosis and Blood Donation: A Survey Among Blood Services

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BACKGROUND AND AIM

Haemochromatosis is a disorder of iron metabolism, requiring frequent phlebotomy to normalise high serum iron levels. There is currently no consensus relating to the eligibility of these patients to donate blood for transfusion. In order to gain a better understanding of the policies worldwide, a survey amongst blood services was performed.

METHOD

A web-based questionnaire was developed and distributed among 44 blood services in 41 countries to identify the different policies relating to patients with haemochromatosis and blood donation.

RESULTS

Respondents from 35 blood services (80%) of 33 countries completed the questionnaire:

- In 24 blood services among them (69%), individuals with genetic susceptibility for haemochromatosis and/or patients with haemochromatosis are accepted as blood donors (Figure 1).
- Need for standardisation of policy
- The most common reasons (i.e. indicated by 9-15 blood services) were internal regulations and/or expert consensus. Regulations as a result of personal preference and/or ethical concerns were also listed (i.e. 4-7 blood centres) (Figure 2).
- Need for evidence-based policy*

In 24 blood services among them (69%), individuals with genetic susceptibility for haemochromatosis and/or patients with haemochromatosis are accepted as blood donors. In approximately one third of these blood centres (33%), genetic carriers/patients are allowed to donate blood more frequently than regular donors.

Prescription from/approval by the patient’s treating physician and/or a donor physician is required in the majority (87%) of the blood services.

Similar policies were identified in a few countries, however, in general the policies regarding blood donation from patients with haemochromatosis remain widely variable (Figure 3).

CONCLUSION

The results of our survey demonstrate large differences in the blood donation policies regarding carriers/patients with haemochromatosis, illustrating the need for a standard evidence-based, cost-effective policy which could benefit both haemochromatosis patients and the blood supply around the world.