

Informing patients about blood transfusion

Sir,

Over 1.8 million red blood cell units were issued in the UK in 2016 (Bolton-Maggs et al, 2016). Blood transfusion is associated with a significant risk of complications (Murphy et al, 2015; Bolton-Maggs et al, 2016). However, clinical practice regarding informed consent for blood transfusion is historically poor, with several studies demonstrating inconsistent and incomplete information being provided to patients (Court et al, 2010; Davis et al, 2012; Friedman et al, 2012; Cheung et al, 2014).

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence published guidelines in November 2015, defining a new 'gold standard' regarding informing patients about blood transfusion (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2015; Padhi et al, 2015).

The authors sought to determine whether this standard is being met by St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, a large urban teaching hospital. A sample of 46 adult patients receiving red cell transfusions on medical, surgical and ambulatory wards was audited, of which 34 patients were interviewed.

Adherence to the latest National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines was poor – 6% (2) of the patients interviewed were informed about the risks of transfusion, and 3% (1) were

informed about alternatives to transfusion. No patients were offered an information leaflet.

A two-stage rapid cycle quality improvement project was undertaken following the initial audit, consisting of a 'blood transfusion information pack' being placed on wards to prompt clinicians to inform patients about transfusion.

After cycle one 16 patients were interviewed. The proportion of patients informed of risks and alternatives to transfusion increased to 38% (6), and 31% (5) were offered an information leaflet. A sustained improvement was seen after cycle two in which 7 patients were interviewed – 43% (3) and 57% (4) of patients respectively.

These results demonstrate that patients are poorly informed about blood transfusion – findings which may be representative of widespread clinical practice in hospital medicine. This is a simple intervention which, if implemented on a larger scale, has the potential to improve patients' knowledge of blood transfusion.

Ethan Troy-Barnes

Core Medicine Trainee

Kelly Feane

Transfusion Practitioner

Sarah Carr

Transfusion Practitioner

James Uprichard

Consultant Haematologist

St George's University Hospitals NHS

Foundation Trust

London SW17 0QT

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Erratum

The authors of the article *Occult giant cell arteritis with an abnormal temporal artery finding and normal blood markers* (vol 78(8), 2017, p. 473; <https://doi.org/10.12968/hmed.2017.78.8.473>) were published in the wrong order.

Dr Emma Samia-Aly should be the first author and Dr Simon Madge should be the second author. We apologise for any confusion caused.

Correspondence

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