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Editorial

## Celebrating donors and the World Blood Donor Day 2018

*Journée mondiale des donneurs de sang 2018 – un coup de projecteur !*

Since 2004, donors are celebrated annually in many countries on the 14th of June in commemoration of the birth date of Karl Landsteiner, the most famous 1930 Nobel Prize winner in the field of transfusion who discovered the ABO blood groups (1901) and co-discovered the Rhesus D (now termed RH:1) blood group (1940). This event, initially launched by the World Health Organization (WHO), has prestigious patrons: the WHO, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the International Federation of Blood Donors, etc. It aims at shedding light on altruism, generosity and humanity of voluntary non-remunerated blood donation (VNRD). Each year since, a country stands as the official host of the event. For example, France has hosted the World Blood Donor Day (WBDD) in 2013 with the following slogan: “Give the gift of life: Donate Blood”. The 2018 host will be Athens, Greece, through the Hellenic Blood Centre and the slogan will be: “Be there for someone else. Give Blood. Save life”. The specific aims of this year’s event can be accessed through the WHO website: <http://www.who.int/campaigns/world-blood-donor-day/2018/en/>. Compared to previous slogans available in the following document: *World Blood Donor Day 2018 – dates, history, themes, quotes* (<http://www.indiacelebrating.com/events/world-blood-donor-day/>), this year’s one promotes empathy towards beneficiaries of donated blood components. Greece is one of the European countries with a high blood donation index as indicated in the European Blood Alliance survey available online ([http://www.europeanbloodalliance.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/EBA\\_AR\\_2016.pdf](http://www.europeanbloodalliance.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/EBA_AR_2016.pdf)). However, there is still a need to ensure adequacy of blood for the transfusion program of transfusion-dependent patients with thalassemia that is currently consuming about 20% of the total blood supply. Swiss Red Cross blood services have been for years contributing generously to this program with the donation of about 25,000 RBC units annually covering in particular periods when strict blood safety measures are implemented against arboviruses or in the face of locally acquired cases of malaria following sporadic introduction [1,2]. The idea of sharing good health, wherever it is, to the benefit of the sick wherever they are, would be a dream for convinced Europeans

citizens. This dream may become true in the future but still, blood component inventory is national and not all countries share the same concept of ethics regarding blood donation. WHO makes considerable effort to invite countries worldwide to switch from paid or replacement donations towards VNRD, with the objective to achieve this goal by 2020 (postponed to 2025 in the Middle East) [3,4]. It is doubtful that this goal can be achieved by 2020, not only because this is too much effort to make the switch, but because some countries including in Europe make little effort in that sense. Some red blood cell components are still paid or compensated to donors in European countries, not to speak of plasma for fractionation [5]. “Be there for someone else” is an elegant slogan and it gracefully depicts what blood donation should be: a share. It may be a challenge for our Greek colleagues as doubts were raised regarding campaigns to attain sufficiency and questions were raised whether highlight should be on needs rather than on altruism [6,7]. Besides, it is interesting to note that each calendar day is used to celebrate several events with country or continent variations and most of them – apart from national days, major religious feasts or commemorations and New Year’s days – are chiefly commercial (and even though, there has been consistent merchandizing of those religious and New Year’s days). WBDD appears quite unique in this landscape in being just the opposite: this is the celebration of the non-merchandized exchange of a precious and mostly valuable “good”: blood. Are blood and blood components goods? [8,9]. That is a real question worth to be seriously addressed, not only by Jane or John Doe but also by country states who apply VAT at each step of the blood processing from the donors’ veins to the patients’ veins. This is this author’s personal opinion that European authorities which have wisely split rules applicable to plasma derivatives (considered drugs) and labile blood components [10,11] would help (promoting) propagating the specialness of blood components by revising the VAT policy and emphasizing on the donation more than on the trade aspects. “I had a dream. . . and maybe once my dream comes true”. Until then, let’s start by smaller achievements and celebrate donors, giving them a handful of thanks and

applauses. They are probably not heroes in their everyday lives but they gesture as heroes occasionally because they really do save lives. As we have been given already the occasion to stress out this point in this journal [12], we also wish WBDD to be more visible in clinics where transfusion are given to beneficiaries, and to the medical personnel who should not consider the blood components they place orders for as another drug or medicine, just because it has now reached a safety level similar to the one usually offered by industrial processes. It would be very unfair to ignore blood donors' altruism because blood has become safer than ever.

Last, as the editor-in-chief of this journal and alongside with its very dedicated editorial board, I would be more than happy to carry on welcoming papers dealing with blood donation and difficulties in achieving self-sufficiency of VNRD from a variety of groups worldwide willing to share experiences. This would hopefully represent not only a move forward to quality and safety in the donation process and the transfusion chain, but also another form of thanks to the address of anonymous donors of any skin color, religion, skills and speaking languages. . . Long life to the WBDD initiative! And bravo to the Greek welcome of the event and its 2018 slogan: "Be there for someone else. Give Blood. Save Life".

#### Disclosure of interest

The author declares that he has no competing interest. Further, this paper reflects the author's own opinion and not necessarily those of his employers.

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