

**NHSBT Board Meeting
29th March 2018**

Patient Story: Once a donor, always a donor?



This month we hear from one of our Donor Carers, Martin, who told me his story. This week he celebrates his first anniversary of working for NHSBT.

Nearly 40 years ago, as a young man, Martin decided that he would donate his blood as he wasn't that crazy about the idea of donating anything after he had died. He started by donating whole blood but then after a few years he got a letter saying that he had very high levels of anti-tetanus antibodies and would he consider donating plasma? He changed and donated plasma for quite a few years before later switching to donate platelets. He did this at his local Donor Centre which he visited every month. In those days this was a two-arm procedure which prevented all sorts of things like scratching your nose, eating a sandwich or reading a book. He eventually had to stop many years later as his platelet count was getting a bit low and he reluctantly went back to donating whole blood but felt quite rejected by this. A few years later he had to stop altogether, for medical reasons, but by that stage had donated an amazing amount – more than 400 units.

He remembers particularly the time where he was a bit late and when he arrived at the Donor Centre everybody was relieved. When he asked why? They answered that he was a perfect match for a child who needed platelets and today they were collecting for that child – that piece of information made him feel very important and today he is a big fan of the text messages we send out for the same reason – giving donors information makes them feel valued.

Away from the Donor Centre, he started working life as a wood machinist and then, after 10 years, he got a temporary role as a Postman with the Royal Mail. Thirty-one years later having worked as a Postman, Delivery Driver and Manager he found he had had enough of organisational restructures and reapplying for his job and decided to leave, aged 57. He was wondering what to do next and his daughter, a physiotherapist, said that he should think about a job in the NHS. Soon afterwards he saw an advert for a post in our Donor Centre and successfully applied to work for us.

He loves the people aspects of the work especially; talking to donors, explaining the importance of what they are doing, the need to also donate tissues and organs and join the Organ Donation Register are common topics of conversation. He feels empathy for the

donors and makes them feel important. The technical side of the role he has found challenging and he hates it when he misses a vein – remembering everything in the right order whilst still speaking and being nice to donors is sometimes hard and twice he forgot to clean an arm, earlier on in his post, resulting in the donations being discarded which made him feel a bit of a failure – now he remembers ‘TCP’ (tape, clean, puncture) to remind himself. The work is busy and sometimes it’s quite stressful trying to get the donors through quickly and safely.

Talking to Martin, I was reminded how much we ask of our Donor Carers – they have to be able to talk to people, make them feel at ease, explain what we do, execute a precision task (venepuncture), understand and remember the Standard Operating Procedures and regulatory requirements - all at the same time, as well as drive a van and unload heavy equipment and be on their feet all day. They do a fantastic job.

We have in the past occasionally considered our donors as a potential pool of people to work for us but we would like to explore how we might increase this in the future.

My thanks to Martin for being open, honest, a great advocate for us and support to donors, as well as for saving or improving the lives of hundreds of people by donating his blood.

Dr Gail Mifflin - Medical and Research Director