

NHSBT Board

September 2020 Patient Story

Status: Official

Jane was employed for a time at our Donor Centre in Birmingham – this is her story and an extract from her Blog.

We've been trained to take a needle out of a donor and secure their donation to ensure it's preserved and safe, and also be confident the donor feels well and is ready to leave the Donor Centre. The Donor Carer role is split into two distinct obligations for us, working with Whole Blood donors and Platelet/Plasma donors, and although there is a cross-over there are distinct differences too. Platelet/plasma donors are attached to a Trima machine - Our job is to load the machines with the cartridge which runs the machine and enables the blood collection, and after donation we 'take down' the machine, ensure the plasma/platelet donation is secured and remove the needle from the donor's arm. The human element of this job is people skills! You need to be relatively comfortable looking at blood, needles, seeing needles put into people (!), seeing the bags of plasma and handling all of these following a donation. But arguably even more importantly, you need to be able to recognise when a donor might be feeling unwell, ensure they're as comfortable as possible throughout the process and alert the staff with the medical skills when it's clear someone is not coping or has begun to feel unwell. During my first week I spent around 20 minutes assisting a regular whole blood donor who felt faint whilst donating blood. The mantra of the Blood Donation Centre is to preserve the donation, but equally you need to ensure that person is safe and if they tell you they feel faint or unwell you need to act. In this case, the donor thought she was going to pass out, so her needle was taken out, and it was my job to ensure she got a drink and a chocolate biscuit, we put a cold air fan on her, and she and I chatted nonsense until the colour returned to her face and she felt well enough to leave. This is all a bit serious, where's your usual self-deprecating humour and tales of cats in your Blog, I (might) hear you ask..? Well, my humour has sort of left me on this one...it's a tough placement. The training is very intense. We've been fast-tracked into a role that takes many months of training under normal circumstances, but the virus has made the world anything but normal. I have never worked so hard in my life! I have pretty much always had a desk job, I sit around all day - moaning about sitting around all day, and then I see what the reality is for folks who don't - and I know which option I prefer! I have so much respect for the staff who do this day in day out. For nursing staff, anyone who works in healthcare who stands for hours on end and works long shifts. The permanent staff are like a mini army, they work tirelessly, they are efficient, they are literally saving lives with their work. The donors are incredibly selfless and humble, they donate their time and their blood to help save lives, they are heroes to me. Many times, regular donors tell me, they hate needles, they hate the sight of blood, but they donate because they want to. They want to make a difference; they want to contribute if they can.

This is even more prevalent during the pandemic. We are asking recovered COVID-19 patients to travel to the centre in Birmingham and be subjected to needles and questions, and they do it because the antibodies in their plasma might just help us treat seriously ill patients and ultimately, through research, help find a vaccine or successful treatment pathway. I've spoken to a lot of recovered patients now, who have some shared symptoms, but many have experienced either different symptoms or their experience of the virus itself has been different. Many of these donors struggle to donate at all, they don't get through the health check process, their iron levels are low, their veins aren't suitable for donation, but they are willing to come into the centre and give their time. They don't care that we are new staff or even in training - they are willing for us to practice our

newly learnt skills on them and they do it with grace and willingness. They're rapidly becoming my new superheroes; they are selfless, and they are inspiring. Case in point this week, a female donor came to donate Convalescent Plasma. I just happened to be the Donor Carer who screened her, and I was a bit worried for her. She was very emotional. She cried when she told me her circumstance, how she thought in April when the ambulance came out for the second time to treat her for breathing difficulties, that she was going to die. It was her son's birthday and she said, 'I didn't want to die on his birthday, how would he live with that?'. She is petrified of blood, needles, won't even go to the dentist on her own, but she survived and she feels she owes it to anyone else who needs help, to overcome her own fears, and donate her plasma, even if there's the slightest chance it would help. She donated a whole bag of plasma, exactly what we need and a normal collection. When her needle was removed, she burst into tears because she was so elated. She was proud of herself for being brave enough, relieved for herself for recovering, but most of all hopeful that her plasma has the potential to help someone else struggling with this disease. These are unprecedented times, but donors are always needed to support patients who need either a blood or an organ transplant.

Commentary

Jane's story is powerful as and we move into the second phase of Convalescent Plasma collection we are listening to our new Donor Carers and Nurses to understand how we can do this better for our new centres. We have learned that those coming to work in our organisation are excited and motivated to be part of the blood and plasma donation response to the pandemic.

By taking an innovative approach to induction and training, applying blended learning techniques such as e-learning and virtual classrooms, alongside hands on practical exposure, we now know we can bring on board and train much larger numbers than with our original model, and see better outcomes as a result. Through positive engagement with our colleagues, empowering and supporting colleagues to do what is needed locally, we are able to flex and deliver widescale change despite the limitations of the pandemic.

We have always known that our people are our greatest asset but during this time of extraordinary challenge we have seen an incredible response from our colleagues as they step forward and support the organisation and each other. As we continue on this journey, we are ever mindful of the need to ensure the wellbeing of everyone concerned, so we can continue to meet this new challenge and continue to save and improve more lives.

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