



NHSBT Public Board Meeting

06 June 2023

Chief Executive's Report

Status: Official

I am pleased to report to the Board that we are starting the year in a broadly positive position:

- consent for organ and tissue donation is starting to show some improvement;
- blood stocks continue to remain stable;
- we have reached a critical milestone on the plasma programme;
- donors continue to respond well to campaigns;
- we are innovating and delivering initiatives to improve health inequalities; and
- we have a plan for the next phase of our intentional inclusion and anti-racism programme.

However, it is early in the year and risks remain to the delivery of our 2023/24 business plan, including achieving a sustainable increase in consent for organ and tissue donation, the potential for more industrial action and managing financial risks in a challenging economic environment.

Our new Chief Executive, Dr Jo Farrar joined us on 1 June making this my last report as Interim Chief Executive before taking on the role of Deputy Chief Executive.

1. Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation

The last few months have seen ongoing challenges in the NHS donation environment, and we estimate that the deceased organ donor pool remains about 18% smaller than pre-2020. I am therefore pleased that we helped more people to become deceased organ donors and transplant recipients in 2022/23 than the year before. We will release our Transplant Activity Report during the summer, which will contain detail of around 2% more deceased donors and 5% more transplants.

Public support for organ donation over the last two years has been mixed which is also being reported by colleagues across the world. In the UK, we saw a reduction in the rate of consent, down from 66% to 61% during the last year. Despite this, a continued refinement of donation practices by our expert nursing colleagues and a focus on organ utilisation has enabled a return to 96% of pre-pandemic transplant levels. Raising the level of consent for deceased organ donation remains key to increasing the number of transplants, and I was therefore pleased to see that rate rose to 69% for April, its highest in nearly two years.

A revised marketing strategy has been developed for organ donation which focuses on driving opt-in registrations to support an uplift in the consent rate. Activity will be delivered throughout the year, with paid media advertising in September to support Organ Donation Week

Deemed consent legislation in Northern Ireland was implemented on the 1st June 2023 and all 4 UK nations now have an 'opt-out' system. NHSBT's National Contact Centre has stood up a dedicated team to handle enquiries related to the changes and this will remain in place until the end of the summer.

We set a highly ambitious target for cornea donors in 2022/23 and, as previously reported, we did not achieve this during the year. However, as with organs, we have seen donation rates increase in April and May. The weekly rate has improved from 44 donors a week in February and March, to over 51 donors a week. This remains below our target of 70 donors but shows the continued commitment of our teams and partners to close the gap. We continue our system wide work with NHS England to reduce the backlog for cornea transplantation, and in turn they are supporting hospitals' capacity to complete these important operations. We have begun to import a small number of corneas from Venice Eye Bank whilst we prepare a step change in donation for delivery during the coming year.

2. Maintaining a Stable Blood Supply

The Donor Experience, Blood Supply and Clinical teams have continued to work cohesively to stabilise stocks and deliver high levels of hospital service. In addition to steady stock performance, there have been some recent signs of improvements in donor base performance and in workforce stability, with both staff turnover and sickness absence levels reducing.

Stocks remained stable through industrial action from the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) on Sunday 30 April to Monday 1 May 2023, coinciding with the May Day Bank Holiday. As observed on previous RCN strike days, we were able to proceed with the vast majority of our blood sessions as many of NHSBT's nurses (both RCN members and non-members) chose to work. Coupled with effective planning, this ensured that patients continued to receive the products they needed over this period.

We expect June to be a strong month for growing the donor base, with campaign activity planned for National Blood Week commencing on 12 June. We have benefitted from stronger appointment fill and donation rates from our donor base so far in 2023-24 (65% of booked appointments resulted in a successful donation vs 63% in March. Positively, there are some early signs that staff turnover in Blood Supply is reducing, with turnover levels at the start of the new financial year at 17.8% as compared with a peak of >30% in the last 12 months and sickness absence levels have decreased. These strong donor and workforce improvements have contributed to overall stronger operational performance, which in turn has resulted in more stable blood stock levels and high hospital service levels, with the latest hospital satisfaction survey published this month indicating 9/10 hospitals score us 9 or 10 out of 10 for overall satisfaction.

To build on this solid performance and add further resilience, the 'Future Proofing Blood' Programme has been mobilised. This comes following the DHSC approval to invest in blood collection, manufacturing capacity and donor marketing to give us the ability to collect more blood to meet demand, as well as keeping platelet stocks in a strong position. This is critical in protecting us from supply chain shocks, such as the recent partial loss of the NHSBT Southampton site located in the Southampton General Hospital due to some issues with the roof of the building. The building closure has affected local blood collection and hospital distribution activities. We have been able to maintain platelet collection at Southampton by utilising an unaffected area of the building. We are supplying hospitals from other hospital services sites, including Tooting, Plymouth and Oxford.

3. Working Towards UK Self-Sufficiency in Plasma

In April we celebrated Plasma Donation Week and our life-saving plasma donors. We hosted thank you events at our plasma donor centres in Birmingham, Reading and Twickenham, as well as patient and donor stories in the media during the week. The campaign generated almost twice the average number of weekly registrations, and work continues to convert to active donors, and increase the average frequency of our current base.

The Plasma fractionator procurement process continues to schedule, with final bids submitted on the 21st of April. An evaluation process was conducted throughout May, to determine the most viable offer against the agreed set of award decision criteria. NHSBT and Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) have been supporting NHS England through the process. We anticipate that NHS England will be in a position to make an award to the successful bidder by the end of June 2023.

Fractionator mobilisation and integration are a priority for the Plasma Team and assumptions, activity and timelines will be tested, reviewed and finalised with the successful fractionator partner over the next couple of months.

4. Innovation and Public Engagement to Reduce Health Inequalities

A pilot project aimed at boosting British Bone Marrow Registry (BBMR) recruitment rates, without the need for potential donors to attend a blood donation session continues. The first batch of swabs has been typed in the Colindale lab, demonstrating a successful end-to-end process. Recruitment of donors from ethnic minorities is being prioritised to increase BBMR donor diversity. We have also been granted National Institute for Health and Care Research funding of £300K for a data linkage project, led by NHSBT, investigating health inequalities in stem cell transplantation.

On 23 May 2023, NHS England CEO announced a world-first testing programme for sickle-cell and thalassemia patients in collaboration with NHS Blood and Transplant. The new testing programme will be offered to all c18,000 patients living with these conditions and is expected to help reduce the risks of alloimmunisation arising from blood transfusions over time and offer people living with sickle cell disease a better quality of life where this affects them. This new DNA-based test will be provided by our H&I laboratory in Filton. This important achievement builds on the work of NHSBT scientists working in collaboration with scientists at Cambridge University Hospitals

and with experts in genetics, statistics, data science and transfusion medicine from Amsterdam, Boston, London and New York, together with the 10 other blood services across the world who joined the Blood Transfusion Genomics International Consortium (www.bgc.io).

Our Community Grants Programme helps to fund community, faith, or belief organisations to deliver projects that encourage more Black and Asian people to become donors. It was launched in April, with fifty community groups and organisations across England and Wales receiving a share of £685,000 funding as part of the Government's commitment to continue to tackle health inequalities and promote organ, blood, and stem cell donation among Black and Asian communities.

We are continuing to prioritise recruiting new whole blood donors of Black heritage. In April, we worked with the Black Power List - the most influential Black people in Britain. Dame Sharon White and Lord Simon Woolley gave blood at the new Stratford Donor Centre and other members of the Power List supported the PR push. This event received a great deal of national and regional media as well as in channels specifically aimed at a Black heritage audience. New Black heritage donor registrations went up by a third following this activity.

Additionally, at the end of May, we were delighted to launch a new partnership with Dalgety Teas, one of the most successful British Caribbean-owned tea businesses in Europe. Dalgety Teas can be found in major supermarkets and grocery stores across the country, as well as online and Amazon. A 'give blood' message and QR code link to our website is being printed on c100k tea boxes and will be supported by a social campaign with content featuring the company founder, Mark Dalgety, and Ro Blood donor, and a Sickle Cell recipient talking about the need for more blood donors of Black Heritage. We will be further supporting with a range of Blood-typing and E-recruit events throughout the year at supermarkets with a high footfall of the Black community.

For the upcoming National Blood Week (12 June) we will launch a new blood and plasma recruitment campaign, fronted by actor and comedian Michael Dappah. New advertising creative celebrates that we are a nation of givers, features every-day acts of giving, and encourages our target audiences to extend this way of life into saving lives through donation. The campaign's reach will be extended with support from a coalition of commercial, public sector and charity partners including Meta, Sky, the Civil Service and BT. We will also be working with a celebrated mural artist, high profile influencers and key spokespeople to generate news coverage from national media. Other highlights include targeted events, direct marketing to our donor base, a package of materials for donor centres and internal communications to maximise the impact of this campaign.

5. Modernising our Services

This month marks a milestone in our Pathology labs, in that our first hospital (Kings Mill) went "live" with the functionality to order a fetal RhD screening test from NHSBT electronically, with the test results being reported directly to the hospital system. The new process reduces errors and time spent on manual data entry by both staff in

NHSBT and at the hospital. This is the first step in our ambition to modernise our Pathology laboratories and move to electronic requesting and reporting of our testing services directly to hospitals' systems.

Important work to register organ donation consent has made very positive strides forward in Wales, with a Public Beta for the NHS App Wales launched in April. This provides the opportunity for those registered with a GP Surgery in Wales to record their Organ and Tissue Donation decision on the NHS Organ Donor Register. We now look ahead to the exciting work to fully integrate the NHS Organ Donor Register into the NHS App Wales. When complete this will offer Welsh citizens a gold standard fully authenticated method of creating, reviewing and updating a decision on the register.

6. People and Culture

Leadership & Management Development is a critical intervention to improving performance and culture. Focus has been on developing the new offer for middle managers and delivering the inclusive leadership programme, Manager as Coach and Influencing Skills courses. Open house sessions on Personal Development Performance Reviews, completing a pilot focussed on authentic leadership, inclusive leadership and building team relationships. We also launched an additional cohort of 25 on the Edward Jenner programme and continue to support all four cohorts. We will be launching our Management Essentials and Corporate Induction in the next couple of months.

The latest our voice survey closed at 4,188 colleagues completing the survey, or 63% completion rate and this included (for the first time) colleagues on bank or honorary contracts. Our focus now will shift to making sense of the data and providing insights to the ET and Board to decide on our corporate priorities for the coming year.

Data gathering has started for our 2022/23 Workforce Race Equality Standard and Workforce Disability Equality Standard reports, the timetable has been brought forward so the reports will be available for review earlier in the year.

Industrial action has been ongoing across the NHS, and NHSBT impacting NHSBT staff and our services. In March 2023 the government made a pay offer which the trade unions agreed to put to their members. Following the results from ballots across the individual trade unions the NHS Staff Council accepted the offer for all staff on Agenda for Change in a meeting held on 2 May. This will be paid to colleagues in June.

However, risks associated with industrial action remain. The risk to blood stocks associated with industrial action remains, with the RCN and UNITE unions signalling their intent to continue action. The RCN are re-balloting members on their willingness to participate in action with results expected after 23 June 2023.

The Forward Together Programme focussed on intentional inclusion and anti-racism continues. A 12-month plan that will be delivered through the 4 project workstreams has been completed.

The workstreams are as follows:

1. Anti-racist framework
2. Policies, Processes, and Procedures
3. Education and Awareness
4. Behaviour Framework – the pilot of this is due to launch soon

Whilst we have built our internal agenda we have additionally sought insight from outside our organisation connecting with other organisations who are further along their journey of being intentionally inclusive and/or anti racist and use their lessons learned to ensure better outcomes and increased success of the programme. To provide objective assurance we are seeking to appoint an external chair, and to widen our insight and ensure good governance our Diversity Networks will be included in our Steering group with effect from June 23.

7. Finance

An early draft of the 2022/23 Annual Report and Accounts has been provided to DHSC and our external auditors Mazars, on behalf of the NAO. We continue to be on plan for laying the report before Parliament no later than mid-July.

At the March Board, we advised that there continued to be a number of outstanding items, not included in the budget for 2023/24. Since then, we've received confirmation on most of these. The key change is that the deficit approved by the Board in March (-£4.6m), has now increased to -£18.0m. This does not though imply a worsened position, and reflects an accounting treatment, with the deficit being funded by cash reserves that we already have within our baseline.

At this early stage of the year, our funding envelope for 2023/24 remains deliverable. However, we are aware of a number of key risks which could materially impact on the finance position, e.g., Blood operating model / Estates. We will continue to monitor these closely throughout the year.

Looking ahead, we have started to develop the detailed funding model for 2024/25 and also the longer-term view on financial sustainability over a five-year horizon. In doing so, we will be working closely with stakeholders across the system, in preparation for discussion with our commissioners later in the year.

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