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World Blood Donor Day

“Give the gift of life, donate blood”

Each year, countries throughout the world celebrate World Blood Donor Day on June 14th. This year’s theme **‘Give the gift of life, donate blood’** highlights the need for safe blood and blood products and provides an opportunity to thank voluntary blood donors for their life-saving gifts of blood.

Every year 107 million blood donations are collected worldwide. A single unit of donated blood can save up to three lives. The transfusion of blood and blood products support complex medical and surgical procedures and save millions of lives each year. Transfusions can also help patients suffering from life threatening conditions to live longer and with higher quality of life. About half of worldwide blood donations are collected in high-income countries, home to only 15% of the world’s population. However, many countries lack an adequate supply of safe blood. Many patients requiring transfusion, particularly in developing countries, do not have timely access to safe blood and lives are needlessly lost. An adequate supply of safe blood can only be ensured through regular donations by voluntary unpaid blood donors.



Members of the public have their blood pressure checked before donating blood during World Blood Donor Day at the Hospital Nacional Guido Valadares

Timor-Leste is one such country that does not have an adequate supply of safe blood. Earlier this year, David Schoemaker, Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (FRACS) made a direct appeal through East Timor Action Network (ETAN) for further blood donations to the National Hospital stating that “It is a near daily occurrence that there are patients in the hospital whose operation is delayed, or whose recovery is jeopardised, or who simply die, for the lack of blood. This appeal is to ask all of you to consider a regular visit to the hospital to donate blood- whatever blood group you are. Let's lead by example.”

To raise awareness on blood donation in Timor-Leste, over 200 participants gathered at the Hospital Nacional Guido Valadares, Dili to observe World Blood Donor Day this year. Among those present were Mr. Jose dos Reis Magno, the Director General, Ministry of Health, Dr. Jorge Mario Luna, WHO Representative to Timor-Leste, representatives from the Global Fund, Cruz Vermelha Timor-Leste, National Laboratory and staff from the National Hospital.



Dr. Domingos da Silva the Director General of the Hospital Nacional Guido Valadares interviewed by local media at the World Blood Donor Day event

The event was opened with a special Mass, followed by speeches from the President of the Organizer Commission, Mr. Arsenio Jose Alves Guterres Afonso, the Director General of the Hospital Nacional Guido Valadares, Dr. Domingos da Silva and the representative of the voluntary blood donors, Mrs. Leocadia de Jesus. Over 45 people donated blood during the event. The voluntary donors were later presented with certificates and pens to acknowledge their life saving contributions and to promote voluntary blood donation in Timor-Leste.

It is hoped that the observation of World Blood Donor Day will ensure that blood donors are thanked for their donations, voluntary unpaid blood donation is promoted and that Ministries of Health throughout the world are convinced to commit to achieving self-sufficiency in safe blood and blood products. WHO's goal is for all countries to obtain all their blood supplies from 100% voluntary unpaid donors by 2020. Presently, only 62 countries have national blood supplies that are based on close to 100% voluntary unpaid blood donations, with 40 countries still dependent on family donors and even paid donors. This day has become an integral part of national blood programmes in countries across the world and an occasion to thank, appreciate and acknowledge voluntary blood donors.



Member of the public donates blood during World Blood Donor Day celebration at Hospital Nacional Guido Valadares, Dili, Timor-Leste



Sr. Domingos da Silva, DG of Hospital Nacional Guido Valadares, Sr. Jose dos Reis Magno, DG of Ministry of Health, Dr. Jorge Mario Luna, WHO Representative to Timor-Leste and guests attend World Blood Donor Day