

Blood Donation and Religious Affiliation: Ramadan Experience

Nasim Sadat Hosseini¹, Fariba Seighali²

1. International Expert in Iranian Blood Transfusion Organization

2. Assistant Professor, High Institute of Education and Research in Transfusion Medicine

All religions place a great value for preserving of human life and helping others against hardship. In Bible God says: "Greater love has no one than this, which someone laid down his life for his friends." Saving a life is of paramount value in Islam as the following verse from the Quran illustrates "And if any one sustains life, it would be as if he sustained the life of all mankind".

On the other hand, in many psychological studies, it is proved that religion affiliation has a vital effect on pro-social and altruistic behaviors. People who are more committed to religious bonds contribute more actively in charitable practices.

Therefore, blood donation as an act of charity and also as a necessity for survival is considered extremely commendable in religions.

Holy month of Ramadan is one of the important occasions for blood banks. Ramadan is a month of fasting in which Muslims refrain eating and drinking during the daylight hours.

Although all Muslim scholars confirm the validity of fasting after blood donation but blood banks in Iran and other Islamic countries usually face blood shortages during Ramadan. This is due to a belief among people who believe that blood donation may break their fast. Other reason which prevents blood donors to donate is that blood donation during fasting may cause weakness and blood donors may be forced to break their fast.

To overcome this challenge, Iranian Blood Transfusion Organization (IBTO) uses alternative strategies. Launching blood donation drives near religious and cultural centers such as mosques, running blood collection centers after fast-breaking time, conducting awareness-raising programs about the validity and advantages of blood donation during Ramadan and inviting regular blood donors by phone calls and postcards are among these strategies. As a result of these activities, people are more likely to donate blood during Ramadan in recent years.

Another Islamic occasion during Ramadan is Layali al-Qadr (19th, 21st & 23rd of Ramadan) , the anniversary of the night Muslims believe the first verses of the Quran were revealed to the Islamic prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). For Shiites layali- Qadr coincided with martyrdom anniversary of Hadhrat Ali (AS), the first Shiite Imam. Ceremonies are held across Iran to commemorate the memory of the assassinated Imam. During Qadr nights when Muslims stay awake to pray and supplicate to God, the number of blood donors increase as Shiites consider blood donation a way of thanking God for their health and cherishing the memory of their first Imam.

Some people avow to donate blood in these special religious days annually. IBTO gives an appointment to who are over capacity to donate later.

In 2011, during these holy nights (three nights) 36471 blood units have been collected in Iran. This is almost 2.5 times more than average daily rate of blood donation in Iran.

Existence of such beliefs and the culture of making vow to donate blood on other religious days paved the ways for IBTO to reach 100% voluntary non-remunerated blood donation in 2007. These are unique opportunities available for limited blood banks throughout the world and with proper pre-planning, blood services specially those lacking blood supply and volunteer blood donors can be benefited from their considerable advantages.

References

- 1- Holy Bible: (John 15:12-13)
- 2- Holy Qur'an, Al-Ma'idah: 32.
- 3- More regions to suffer blood shortage during Ramadan, August 3 2011. Available from: <http://www.antaraneews.com/en/news/74428/more-regions-to-suffer-blood-shortage-during-ramadan> [Last accessed on 2011 Sep 2].
- 4- Call for Ramadan Blood Donation, Iran Daily. Available from: http://www.irandaily.com/1389/6/7/MainPaper/3764/Page/7/MainPaper_3764_7.pdf [Last accessed on 2011 Sep 2].
- 5- In 2010, on average 4900 unites of blood collected each day in Iran.