

From the Chief Medical Officer  
Dr Michael McBride

From the Chief Nursing Officer  
Mrs Charlotte McArdle

**HSS(MD) 27/2017**

**For Action:** Chief Executives, Public Health  
Agency/Health and Social Care Board/HSC  
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Dear Colleague

## **SAFE TRANSFUSION PRACTICE: USE OF A BEDSIDE CHECKLIST**

### **Action Required:**

**Chief Executives should ensure HSC organisations involved in blood transfusions assess their bedside systems, including electronic systems, to ensure a confirmatory step is in place where the individual performing the checks must sign to say all steps have been followed.**

**Chief Executives should ensure this letter and supporting information contained in the Appendix is circulated to all relevant staff, including to community nursing staff and midwives who may be involved in the transfusion of blood products in the community.**

Since the first report in 1997 the UK national haemovigilance surveillance programme, Serious Hazards of Transfusion (SHOT), has repeatedly identified that patients are harmed, and some die, as a result of being given the incorrect unit of blood.

In 2014 a patient died as a result of an ABO-incompatible transfusion in a high profile case. The nurse collected then administered a unit intended for another patient with a similar name. This would have been prevented if the final bedside check had been done correctly.

There were seven ABO-incompatible transfusions reported to SHOT in 2015, and three in 2016. All of these were preventable. In addition to the risk of ABO-

incompatible transfusion, patients may have other specific, and sometimes critical, transfusion requirements such as irradiated blood, CMV negative serology blood and extended phenotype blood.

Two critical points occur in preparation for transfusion: the first is to correctly identify the patient and label the sample when taking blood for a pre-transfusion blood sample, and the second is to check the details on the unit of blood and the patient's identity at the point of transfusion.

Evidence from SHOT shows that the bedside check performed at the point of transfusion is not always undertaken correctly and that this puts patients at risk of serious complications or death. SHOT therefore recommends a structured process with a **bedside checklist** which must confirm the following:

- positive patient identification including first name, family name and date of birth; unless impossible, this should be done by asking the patient to state their names and date of birth;
- unique identification number (hospital number, NHS number or equivalent);
- check that it is the correct and compatible component, against the prescription and label on the component, for this patient at this time, and
- check that the component meets any specific requirements for that patient.

Additional information is available in the attached appendix.

Yours sincerely



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Chief Medical Officer



**Charlotte McArdle**  
Chief Nursing Officer

### **Circulation List**

Executive Medical Director/Director of Public Health, Public Health Agency (*for onward distribution to all relevant public health staff*)

Assistant Director Public Health (Health Protection), Public Health Agency

Family Practitioner Service Leads, Health and Social Care Board (*for cascade to all GPs and GP locums, and GP Out of Hours services*)

All General Practitioners and GP Locums (*for cascade to all GPs and GP Locums and GP Out of Hours services*)

All General Practitioners and GP Locums (*for onward distribution to practice staff*)

GP Medical Advisers, Health and Social Care Board

Director of Dental Services, HSCB



## Appendix 1

### Wrong transfusions: Background

SHOT is the UK national haemovigilance scheme and has reported since 1996 on adverse incidents related to blood transfusion (20 years). Every year the largest group of reports are those where an incorrect blood component was transfused. This includes incidents where the wrong component was transfused, for example red cells were given when platelets had been prescribed. It includes transfusions where the component transfused was intended for a different patient. Figure 1 shows the cumulative numbers over 20 years. In the first year of reporting 22% National Health Service organisations participated but in recent years this has increased to 100%. These data show that despite the introduction of competency assessments (2) for all staff members who participate in the transfusion process, the numbers of wrong transfusions are not reducing. Over the same period of time the number of serious reactions allergic/febrile, which cannot be predicted have increased in line with the total number of reports (Figure 2).

### Categories of incorrect blood components transfused (IBCT)

**ABO-incompatible red cell transfusions** are the most serious preventable errors and are reportable as 'never events' (3). While these may cause death or serious harm, in about two thirds there are no or minor adverse effects. These events may therefore be under-reported. Altogether 302 have been reported to SHOT. Twenty patients have died and an additional 80 suffered serious harm. ABO-incompatible transfusions have decreased from a maximum of 34 reported in 1999/2000 to between 3 and 14 between 2007 and 2016 (1). These potentially fatal incidents result from two main causes, the wrong patient is sampled ('wrong blood in tube' WBIT) or the component is transfused to the wrong patient.

The risk of sampling the wrong patient is reduced by ensuring every patient has two independent samples taken prior to a first transfusion. This group-check sample is recommended in British Society for Haematology guidelines (4). This policy is now in place in most hospitals (129/177, 73% of respondents to the recent survey from the National External Quality Assessment scheme for blood transfusion). Taking a single sample, splitting it into two and sending them separately at different times completely defeats the purpose of this safety step. In 2016 two of the three ABO-incompatible transfusions were caused by WBIT. If a sample is taken from the wrong patient and there is no group check, a wrong transfusion cannot then be detected by the bedside check. It is notable that in 2016 there were 3 ABO-incompatible transfusions but a further 264 near miss events due mainly to WBIT. These were detected because there was a different historical group. These incidents were caused by poor practice associated with failure to correctly identify the patient and labelling the blood sample tubes away from the bedside.

Other wrong transfusions include giving D-positive cellular components to a D-negative recipient. This carries about a 25% risk of development of anti-D antibodies which can cross the placenta in D-negative women causing damage to fetal red cells if the baby is D-positive.

**Wrong components transfused.** The patient is transfused a different component than the one prescribed or authorised, for example is given platelets instead of red cells.

**Specific requirements not met.** Some patients require components selected for additional features such as irradiated cellular components for certain indications where patients have weakened immune systems (5). This is to reduce the risk of transfusion-associated graft versus host disease where transfused lymphocytes engraft in the recipient. The outcome is usually fatal. Some protection is offered by pre-storage universal leucodepletion. Cumulative SHOT data show that more than 1300 patients have received non-irradiated components since the introduction of leucodepletion in 1999, one patient receiving more than 450 non-irradiated components. Additional specific requirements include cytomegalovirus-screened cellular components for pregnant women (unless emergency transfusion is needed), and red cells matched for additional blood group antigens are recommended for patients with haemoglobin disorders such as the sickle cell diseases and thalassaemia to reduce the risk of potentially serious haemolytic reaction. This is particularly important for patients with known irregular red cell antibodies who require units negative for those antigens.

These specific requirements must be notified to the transfusion laboratory and should be included in the request; they should be noted on the prescription and checked prior to administration. These must be included in the bedside checklist.

## References

1. Bolton-Maggs PHB, Poles D, et al on behalf of the SHOT Steering Group. The 2016 Annual SHOT Report (2017) [www.shotuk.org](http://www.shotuk.org).
2. National Patient Safety Agency. NPSA Safer Practice Notice 14, Right Patient Right Blood (2006). Safer Practice Notices <http://www.nrls.npsa.nhs.uk/resources/collections/right-patient-right-blood/> .
3. NHS England. Never Events List 2015/16 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/never-evnts-list-15-16.pdf> .
4. Milkins C, Berryman J, Cantwell C, Elliott C, Haggas R, et al. Guidelines for pre-transfusion compatibility procedures in blood transfusion laboratories. *Transfusion Medicine* (2013) 23: 3-35.
5. Treleaven J, Gennery A, March J, Norfolk D, Page L et al. Guidelines the use of irradiated blood components prepared by the British Committee for Standards in Haematology blood transfusion task force. *British Journal of Haematology* (2010) 152: 35-51.