

As area grows, so does need for blood donors

Cascade Regional Blood Services offers convenient donation options for the public

BY NEIL PIERSON
of The Herald

Within the last four years, demand for blood and platelet donations at 12 Puget Sound area medical centers has grown by 20 percent.

With the completion of the Good Samaritan Hospital patient care tower project in Puyallup next year, as well as East Pierce County's expected population growth over the next decade, officials at Cascade Regional Blood Services only expect demand to rise. Cascade is the sole provider of blood products to Good Samaritan and four of its Multi-Care Health System partners, as well as several South Sound hospitals run by Franciscan Health System.

Rather than waiting for donors to come to them in Tacoma, Puyallup and Federal Way, Cascade has been deploying teams around the South Sound for 20 years, said Cari Dixon, the group's assistant director of donor resources.

Using four tricked-out recreational vehicles known as "bloodmobiles" and three other vehicles that can set up donation centers in churches, conference rooms or gymnasiums, Cascade hits a variety of locations in the region every week of the year.

"It's really about timing and convenience for donors," Dixon said. "You've got to be

at the right place when you don't have your kids, you're not schlepping your stuff, you don't have to get to a meeting. It's tough. We fight for people's time."

Dixon said that if every resident living in Cascade's service area donated twice a year, blood shortages wouldn't occur. But shortages are often compounded by the fact that nearly two-thirds of the nation's population can't give blood, according to multiple national studies. Many are ineligible because of their age, pre-existing health conditions or because they've recently lived or traveled in areas where malaria is prevalent.

Of the 37 percent who can donate blood, less than one in seven do.

"It can be tough in the summer and during the holidays," Dixon said. "It takes more blood drives in the off seasons to collect the units that we need."

School-based drives represent about 20 percent of Cascade's blood supplies each year, Dixon noted. To make up for those shortfalls during summer vacation, the organization is utilizing partnerships with many local businesses.

One of those partnerships is at Sumner engineering firm Parametrix, which has been holding employee-based blood drives since 1999. National safety standards allow donors to give every 56 days, so Parametrix typically has a bloodmobile in its parking lot every eight weeks.

Jamee Tate, a Parametrix project manager, gave blood last week and says her company does a good job of soliciting donors.

TO DONATE:

Cascade Regional Blood Services offers regular bloodmobile visits throughout East Pierce County. Donors can also stop by the Puyallup branch located at 205 15th Ave. S.W. For more information, call 253-841-4236 or visit www.crbs.net.

"There's usually a lot of e-mails that will go out and posters in the hallway that show the bloodmobile is going to be here, so you just put it on your calendar that they're going to be here," Tate said. "It just helps the community and it's a good thing to do to give back."

Stacie Escott, a Cascade employee who was assisting Parametrix employees last week, said donors should set aside 30 to 60 minutes to complete the process. Donors also have to present photo identification, fill out a short health questionnaire and have their vital signs checked.

"You always want to eat a hearty meal, drink lots of fluids before you come in," Escott said.

Graham resident Georgia Kahler donates several times a year when the bloodmobile visits the Safeway store near her home. She missed a previous appointment while on vacation, so she caught the bloodmobile last week during its visit to Sunrise Village in South Hill.

"My father always donated blood and he kind of instilled that in me," Kahler said. "So it's community service, I feel."

Dixon said it's often difficult to find people willing to give on a regular basis.



Herald photo/Colleen Carroll

Donor Specialist Linda Blackwell readies Leanna Cloer's arm to donate blood inside the Cascade Regional Blood Services truck at Sunrise Village. Cloer was unable to donate blood because of a lack of hydration and will return on another day to donate her blood.

"Our average blood drive is about 15 donors," she said. "We get a lot of first-time, one-time donors and then it's hard to get them back in. No one wants to get stuck with a needle. It's no one's top priority."

Dixon and Escott said the public awareness for donation needs is a constant battle. Roughly a quarter of Cascade's supplies go directly to Good Samaritan, where they're often used for emergency transfusions and helping cancer patients.

All blood types are needed, officials said, because the percentage of patients who can use a specific blood type varies greatly. For example, O-negative blood can be given to anyone in a life-threatening condition but only 3 to 4 percent of patients can use AB-negative or AB-positive

blood.

"We have a group of callers and they'll get that list of the greatest needs before we even get it (at the bloodmobile)," Escott said.

"The need for blood is constant so the need for us to be out is constant," she added. "Unfortunately, it never goes away."



Charlotte Simmonds,
MS, ATC, CSCS

Q. My friend hurt her knee playing soccer. She said the doctor called it the "unhappy triad". What does that mean?

A. Unfortunately your friend has sustained a significant knee injury involving 3 different soft tissue structures in the knee. Her meniscus (soft cushioning cartilage) has torn, the Medial Co-lateral Ligament (MCL) has been torn either partially or fully and finally the Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL) has ruptured. In most cases, people will have these injuries surgically repaired. The meniscus is either repaired or trimmed up, the MCL (depending on the specific case) will be