

Transfusion Medicine Education and Training: A Global Overview

Jenny White

Executive Director, International Society of Blood Transfusion, Amsterdam, Netherlands

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Multiple staff groups work in medical, nursing, technical and scientific roles directly relating to blood transfusion, requiring specialist transfusion education and training. There is no consistency in the naming of these roles, or the qualifications required of those undertaking comparable work, and in many cases these roles overlap. In some countries transfusion is not recognized as a specialty and underrepresented in curriculum for more general training in pathology or general medicine. Given that transfusion is one of the most common medical procedures, many more non-specialist health professionals also require basic transfusion knowledge to ensure appropriate prescribing, administration of blood and monitoring of patients for adverse reactions. There is often inadequate transfusion content in primary university degrees in medicine, nursing or biomedical science, and this has been reported by several international studies over the years. In some countries this is supplemented with higher level formal education specifically in transfusion medicine / science, with or without inclusion of practical training as part of the course or in the workplace to put knowledge into practice. In some countries, blood services, national transfusion societies and societies for medicine, nursing, biomedical science provide vocational courses specializing in transfusion. These organizations and others, e.g., Haemovigilance or EQA schemes (that regularly report lack of knowledge contributing to incidents and errors), also provide educational material and opportunities for short courses and updates on specific topics, often on-line and usually with self-directed learning. In the digital age a variety of innovative methods for delivering education are available such as webinars, eLearning, quizzes and simulation training.

At an international level, WHO provides policy, guidance, education, and practical training in areas such as GMP, especially in lower resource settings. ISBT provides opportunities for education in transfusion medicine, science and the operation of blood services via congresses, webinars, a webcast library, links to guidelines and other useful policy documents from different countries, practical toolkits developed with WHO and ISBT scientific working parties, and CME accredited interactive eLearning modules. WHO encourages cascade training wherever possible, partnering with many other organizations to help with local delivery.

As an example of a transfusion specific philanthropic organization, the ISBT Foundation, funds applications for education / training provided by local experts where the organizers understand local requirements to provide relevant and focused training, with the opportunity for international speakers, if required, to broaden the perspective. These initiatives, whilst useful, are not a substitute for systematic education in transfusion medicine, embedded in a country's healthcare system. Whilst the need for specialist transfusion education and training is widely recognized within the blood transfusion community, the range of skills and knowledge required to operate blood services, hospital transfusion, safe and appropriate clinical use of blood and an increasing range of substances of human origin is widely underestimated by hospital management, health authorities and governments. Advocacy is required for specialized transfusion education and training in core programmes for medicine, biomedical science and nursing, and in ongoing professional development.

Disclosure

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