

Regulation of Blood Transfusion Services in Quetta, Balochistan: Findings and Future Directions

Muhammad Hanif Mengal, Abdul Haleem

Quetta Regional Blood Centre, Provincial Ministry of Health, Balochistan Pakistan

Cite this article as: Mengal Mh, Haleem A. Regulation of Blood Transfusion Services in Quetta, Balochistan: Findings and Future Directions. Ann Pak Inst Med Sci. 2024;20(Suppl. 2):910. doi: 10.48036/apims.v20iSuppl.2.1290.

The provision of healthcare services in Balochistan, a province marked by unique geographical and socio-economic challenges, is managed through a mix of public and private sectors. The government, as the dominant provider, ensures preventive care across the province and serves as the main source of curative services in rural areas. The Balochistan government approved the Balochistan Safe Blood Transfusion Act, 2004 (Act III of 2004), followed by the issuance of the Balochistan Safe Blood Transfusion Rules, 2005 (Notification No. PC (H) SBT/2005/4691-4694), to establish a framework for the regulation and quality assurance of blood transfusion services throughout the province. An analysis was conducted with the primary objective of implementing the Balochistan Safe Blood Transfusion Act, 2004, to strengthen and standardize blood transfusion practices and ensure that blood and blood products provided to patients meet safety and quality standards. The establishment of the Blood Transfusion Authority (BTA) was formally announced in August 2004 under Section 4(1) of the Balochistan Safe Blood Transfusion Act, 2004. However, for a prolonged period, the Authority remained inactive and was unsuccessful in fulfilling its intended regulation. Renewed efforts to operationalize the BTA commenced between 2017 and 2020, driven by strategic partnerships with the World Health Organization (WHO), KfW-EPOS, and technical support from the Islamabad Blood Transfusion Authority. A critical step undertaken during this phase was the comprehensive mapping of blood banks within Quetta, employing the snowball sampling technique to identify operational facilities. This mapping exercise uncovered a total of 72 blood banks functioning in Quetta, the provincial capital of the province. Analysis of the mapped blood banks revealed significant issues with most of these facilities. Out of 72

identified blood banks, 69 were found to rely on rapid screening devices that were substandard and economically inexpensive, raising serious concerns about the reliability and safety of their procedures. Furthermore, these 69 blood banks did not perform blood cross-matching due to the lack of proper infrastructure and equipment. Most of these blood banks operated in small, single-room setups adjacent to laboratories, highlighting the limitations of their capacity. Despite handling only 2-3 donations per day, these blood banks managed to generate considerable income. The findings of this investigation were presented to the Secretary of Health, who also serves as the Chairman of the Balochistan Blood Transfusion Authority (BBTA). The Secretary acknowledged and appreciated the progress that had been made in the regulatory oversight of blood banks in Quetta. The BBTA set a target to complete inspections of the remaining blood banks in the province. The plan included extending inspections to the remaining districts of Balochistan to ensure province-wide compliance.

The findings from the initial mapping and inspections underscore the urgent need for systematic follow-up activities to collect comprehensive data from all operational blood banks. The unregulated expansion of small, inadequately equipped blood banks poses a risk to the safety and quality of blood transfusion services. Therefore, decisive measures must be taken to curtail this proliferation and to integrate blood bank operations into a cohesive system anchored by the newly established Regional Blood Centre in Quetta. This centre should serve as a model for safe, quality-assured blood and blood component services. A concerted and sustained effort is essential to strengthen regulatory oversight, enhance service delivery standards, and promote public trust in the blood transfusion system in Balochistan.

Disclosure

The author(s) declare no conflicts of interest. This study was presented as an oral presentation during the 5th International Annual Conference of BBMT-Pakistan (Bring Brilliant Minds of Transfusion) in Langkawi, Malaysia, December 5-6, 2024. The abstract is published in Annals of PIMS. 2024;20 (Suppl. 2; doi: 10.48036/apims.v20iSuppl.2.1290).