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Erin Myers
Director of Source Plasma
BloodSource®

A fresh source for growth

A year after introducing source plasma collection, California’s BloodSource® is thriving. Here’s why.

Just about every day at more than 600 non-profit blood donation centers in the U.S., donors generously supply red blood cells and platelets for transfusion to needy patients. But at six newly transformed centers operated by BloodSource of California, something very different happens.

Instead of contributing cells for normal transfusion, a steady stream of both longtime and first-time donors show up for a different purpose, one that represents a vital new growth path for the regional non-profit organization. They’re here to donate source plasma, the straw-colored fluid that carries red and white blood cells, platelets and other nutrients through the body.

Donors who provide this essential liquid aren’t relinquishing red blood cells; those cells are returned during the donation session itself. Instead, using a process called Plasmapheresis, they’re supplying the key ingredient for an increasingly wide range of medicines that save lives. Source plasma is essential for treating chronic conditions including hemophilia, immunodeficiencies and others that depend on immunoglobulin, clotting factors and/or plasma volume expanders. “Health conditions previously unable to be resolved are now treated successfully with plasma-based medicine and therapies,” says BloodSource CEO Rob Van Tuyle.

Source plasma collection represents a promising opportunity for providers like BloodSource that are encountering rapid changes in the industry’s underlying dynamics. With demand for transfusable blood supplies decreasing – a result of advancements in trauma treatment practices among other influences – blood centers are facing pressure to maintain activity levels and donor bases. Source plasma collection offers a promising remedy. Because international demand for plasma-based medicines is rising fast, source plasma collection presents a compelling category extension that aligns well with existing blood center resources and capabilities.

But making the transition to source plasma collection has its challenges. Internally, new collection machinery and operating procedures demand staff training and skills development. Externally, introducing source plasma collection requires a donor-education effort that demystifies this still-unfamiliar category. And finally, there’s the cannibalization worry: The last thing blood centers want is to see a new process eroding platelet or red cell donations from an existing donor base.

A thriving new program

Since initiating its first source plasma collection site located in Granite Bay, Calif. during September 2014, BloodSource® has worked through each of these challenges to produce a thriving source plasma program that meshes gracefully with its traditional collection activities.

As of September 2015, BloodSource introduced source plasma collection at five of its pre-existing blood donation centers, along with the new Granite Bay facility that's dedicated exclusively to source plasma. Its ambitious introduction represents one of the first, and most sweeping, source plasma efforts anywhere.

Getting there has required both careful planning and in some cases, some on-the-spot recalibrations as lessons were learned and new procedures were integrated. Here are some of the key ingredients that have made BloodSource's plasma integration initiative a success:

- **Maintaining the right donor balance.** Sensitive to the possibility of eroding a very active platelet program, BloodSource has been careful to cultivate a balanced donor community. Among approaches that have worked: recruiting from lists of lapsed/prior donors, encouraging frequent plasma donors to shift some of their sessions to source plasma collection, and targeting potential contributors who don't qualify for traditional platelet donations.
- **Making the donor-to-patient link.** Knowing that a key motivator is donor identification with actual patients, BloodSource has strived to give donors as much detail as possible about the end uses of their contributions, says Erin Myers, Director of Source Plasma. "It's about letting them know that although this product goes through further manufacturing and a different process than our transfusable products, in the end there is a patient relying on these, just as there is with our transfusable products that impact lives."
- **Explaining details in advance.** Common questions asked by prospective donors center on the session experience: how is it different from traditional blood donation, what's the process, how long does it take. BloodSource recruiters make a point of setting the right expectations in

advance about subjects like physical exams for new donors (they're non-invasive and relatively quick) and session times (up to two hours for the first visit, and about 90 minutes thereafter).

- **Making sessions comfortable.** Donors have had positive things to say about their session experiences and machine encounters. One common theme revolves around the ability to adjust pump speeds to mediate or optimize comfort levels during donation. Average session times were running at 40 minutes as of September 2015.
- **Leveraging existing resources.** One of the best ways to introduce the source plasma opportunity is to demonstrate it in person when blood donors are physically present at collection centers. For that reason, BloodSource has concluded that the integration of source plasma facilities into existing blood centers is preferable to establishing standalone source plasma centers, says Myers. "We found the best model is really to incorporate into an existing center...it's about being able to see the machine, being able to explain it at the time of donation, being able to convert once we've identified a best donation path for them."
- **Keeping staff in the loop.** Involving staff members in the source plasma transition starting with early planning is critical to achieving internal buy-in and support. "The industry is changing. It's moving quickly and there are a lot of competing priorities," says Myers. "So we really wanted them to understand why BloodSource was starting to collect source plasma, why now, and what they've heard about source plasma in the past."
- **Collaborating closely with partners.** Leveraging Haemonetics Corporation's global experience and solutions in source plasma collection allowed BloodSource to quickly hit the ground running. Installing and operating new collection machines demands not only a training regimen, but the establishment of an updated technology vocabulary. Working closely with support agents from technology partner Haemonetics, BloodSource's staff has become highly adept in operating the new source plasma collection system, yielding average session set-up and teardown times of just a few minutes.

Running the numbers

The early metrics indicate BloodSource is on a positive track with its source plasma program. Total donors through September 2015 have exceeded internal targets, as has the average collection volume per session (800 milliliters versus a target of 725). BloodSource has achieved a 4.5 repeat rate for its plasma program from concurrent donors; a 4.0 rate for converted existing donors; and a 1.5 rate for new donors. The numbers add up to an early success story for a migration to source plasma collection that was first discussed more than 15 years ago and now has taken on a new urgency.

"We see both the declining usage in red blood cell usage and an opportunity to help a new type of patient," says Myers.

It really aligns with our mission. And now is the right time."

For a list of worldwide office locations and contact information, visit www.haemonetics.com/officelocations

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