

The Gift of Life

[Ed. Note: I don't collect Blood Bank covers, but this is a topic that has a special meaning for me. When I was in college, I had a friend whose brother was a hemophiliac. Consequently, my friend was always looking for blood donors, and that's what got me started giving blood. Both my friend and his brother have long since departed this world, but I've been a donor ever since. I'm now approaching my 30th gallon of whole blood. If you're not a regular donor, please consider becoming one. There's always a shortage.]

About 13.9 million units (including approximately 695,000 autologous donations) of Whole Blood are donated in the United States each year by approximately eight million volunteer blood donors. These units are transfused to about 4.5 million patients per year. The need for blood is great--on any given day, approximately 32,000 units of Red Blood Cells are needed. Accident victims, people undergoing surgery, and patients receiving treatment for leukemia, cancer or other diseases, such as sickle cell disease and thalassemia, all utilize blood. Approximately 26.5 million units of blood components are transfused each year.

Less than 5 percent of healthy Americans eligible to donate blood, actually donate each year. According to studies, the average donor is a college-educated white male, between the ages of 30 and 50, who is married and has an above-average income. However, a broad cross-section of the population donates every day. Furthermore, these "average" statistics are changing, and women and minority groups are volunteering to donate in increasing numbers. While persons 65 years and older compose 13 percent of the population, they use 25 percent of all blood units transfused. Using current screening and donation procedures, a growing number of blood banks have found blood donation by seniors to be safe and practical. Here's a quick outline of the major points in the evolution of blood donating:

-1628 English physician William Harvey discovered the circulation of blood. Shortly afterward, the earliest known blood transfusion was attempted. In **1665**, the first recorded successful blood transfusion occurred in England: Physician Richard Lower kept dogs alive by transfusion of blood from other dogs.

-1667 Jean-Baptiste Denis in France and Richard Lower in England separately reported successful transfusions from lambs to humans. Within 10 years, transfusing the blood of animals to humans became prohibited by law because of reactions. Then, in **1795** In Philadelphia an American physician, Philip Syng Physick, performed the first human blood transfusion, although he did not publish this information.

-1900 Karl Landsteiner, an Austrian physician, discovers the first three human blood groups, A, B and O. The fourth, AB, is added by his colleagues A. Decastello and A. Sturli in 1902. Landsteiner receives the Nobel Prize for Medicine for this discovery in 1930. And in **1912** Roger Lee, a visiting physician at the Massachusetts General Hospital, along with Paul Dudley White, developed the Lee-White clotting time. Adding another important discovery to the growing body of knowledge of transfusion medicine, Lee demonstrated that it is safe to give group O blood to patients of any blood group, and that blood from all groups can be given to group AB patients.

*****Please call your local blood bank for an appointment!*****

