

### **What are Platelets and where do they come from?**

- Platelets are special blood cells that help control bleeding by assisting the blood to clot. The platelet cells act like little plugs to block blood from escaping from the blood vessel.
- Platelets used for transfusion come from the 'whole blood' donated to the Australian Red Cross Blood Service by volunteer blood donors. 'Whole blood' is made up of various components- red blood cells, white blood cells, plasma and platelets. Each of these components has different uses within the body. The Australian Red Cross Blood Service separates 'whole blood' into the various components and which are then issued to hospitals for use.

### **Why do I need a Platelet transfusion?**

Platelet transfusions are an important treatment for patients with a low platelet counts who may either be at risk of bleeding or used to control bleeding. Low platelet counts may be as a result of a disease, drug treatment (eg. chemotherapy) or as a result of excessive bleeding.

### **Are Blood Transfusions safe?**

In Australia, blood donated by volunteers is very safe, although as with any other treatment, there are risks.

- Volunteer donors (people who donate blood at the Red Cross Blood Bank) are checked carefully and anyone who may pass on an infectious disease is not permitted to donate blood.
- Donated blood products (including platelets) are also checked for viruses and other germs, which may be carried in blood products and could possibly make you sick
- State-wide surveillance systems are also in place to respond to any potential risks to the blood supply.

### **But what about Platelet Transfusions, are they safe?**

Unlike most other blood components Platelets cannot be refrigerated or frozen as they will be destroyed. Platelets must be stored at room temperature and must be used within 5 days of being donated. As the Platelets are stored at room temperature there may be a small risk of bacterial infection. In an effort to reduce the risk of contracting a bacterial infection, the Australian Red Cross Blood Service (as of April 2008) has commenced a screening process for all platelets. This screening process is very sensitive and involves monitoring a small sample taken from each platelet donation for a seven day period.

### **What happens if the platelet sample being monitored shows signs of bacterial contamination?**

- The screening process monitors a specimen taken from the platelets for seven days observing for bacteria. As previously mentioned Platelets need to be transfused within 5 days of collection, therefore the results of these tests may not be available until after the platelets have been transfused. This testing is very sensitive meaning that it may appear that bacteria are present when later testing shows that there are no bacteria in the platelets.
- The hospital will be told when these initial tests are positive and if the platelets have not been used they will be removed from stock and not transfused.
- If the platelets have been transfused, the doctor in charge of your treatment will be contacted and informed. They will then monitor you for any signs of infection and start treatment as soon as possible if appropriate.
- If you have received the platelet transfusion as a day patient and have been sent home after treatment and the hospital is informed that the screening test is positive, you will receive a call from your doctor at home to check on your condition and to arrange follow up to ensure you do not experience any problems. This **may occur at any time of the day or night.**

**Some things to look out for after receiving any Blood Product Transfusion, including Platelets.**

- **Feeling nauseated or sick** (this could also be caused by any treatment you have received).
- **A rash appearing, itchy skin** (may also be a side-effect of any treatment)
- **Feeling very hot or feverish.**
- **Chest Pain**
- **Headache**
- **Difficulty breathing**
- **Pain anywhere in your body**
- **Feeling light-headed or vague** (could also be as a result of treatment or underlying illness).

It is always important that you immediately report any signs of infection (such as fever, chills or shakes or sweats) as soon as possible to your doctor in order to receive appropriate treatment. If you have any questions or concerns please contact your doctor or the nearest hospital as soon as possible. If you have any questions about the information contained in this brochure or if you have any other questions about the transfusion of any blood products, please speak to your nurse or doctor.

**PLEASE NOTE THAT BLOOD PRODUCT TRANSFUSION REACTIONS ARE VERY RARE.**

M JODOIN, TRANSFUSION NURSE  
BENDIGO HEALTH- MAY 2008.

Bendigo Health wishes to acknowledge Bayside Health for the use of some of the information used in this brochure.

**IF YOU BELIEVE THAT YOU MAY BE EXPERIENCING A REACTION TO THE PLATELET TRANSFUSION YOU HAVE RECEIVED-**

**PLEASE CALL:**

- YOUR OWN GP OR TREATING DOCTOR (DURING BUSINESS HOURS)
- NEAREST HOSPITAL'S EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT, IN BENDIGO THE NUMBER IS: 5454 8102.

**IF YOU FEEL *QUITE UNWELL* CONTACT:**

- AMBULANCE 000
- REMEMBER THAT REACTIONS TO ANY BLOOD PRODUCT TRANSFUSION ARE VERY RARE.**



**GP:**

**NEAREST HOSPITAL:**



**Better BLOOD  
for Bendigo**

**After a Platelet  
Transfusion**

***IMPORTANT  
INFORMATION FOR  
PATIENTS WHO HAVE  
RECEIVED A PLATELET  
TRANSFUSION.***

