



Our Blood Centers — Post September 11



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The events of September 11 focused the Sacramento Medical Foundation Blood Centers' attention on the East Coast. Shock, remorse, sympathy and incredulity were quickly succeeded by action. Long before we understood the full gravity of the situation, our staff was implementing emergency procedures to respond to the potential need for blood resources and the anticipated outpouring of donor support.

Even before the second World Trade Center tower was attacked, our hospital services staff was in touch with the New York Blood Center through connections at Blood Centers of America. We had packaged initial shipments of blood and platelets and were waiting for shipping instructions before our donor rooms were open.

With normal shipping options grounded, we turned to the military. After several hours, staff secured a spot on the military plane from Travis Air Force Base that was to transport the Sacramento Urban Search and Rescue Unit. Blood components from SMF were some of the very few resources to reach the New York Blood Center. Although these emergency resources were ultimately, and tragically, not needed, we are proud of our prompt response to the emergency.

By early morning, donors were lined up at all blood center locations. Our disaster response team was coordinating operations while staff began processing the large numbers of additional donors. We had over five times the number of donors normally collected and tested in a day. Safety of the blood supply and of the donors was never compromised, despite the additional pressure of this unique day.

By 10 a.m. on September 11, we decided to try to direct as many donors as possible to another day or week. Experience has shown that this heavy donor response would result in many times more blood units than could possibly be used, even for the worst scenario. Donors were asked to pledge to return at a later date. We tried to collect just those of "O" blood group, knowing this would be most in demand.

The long lines of donors lasted through the day and well into the night. Staff and volunteers catered to their needs with refreshments, reading materials, conversation and, as always, a heartfelt "thank you." As I worked the lines of donors, doing what I could to make the wait more comfortable and providing as much information as I could, I was overwhelmed by the human spirit of support and compassion by all, staff and donors. I was proud of the staff's selfless pursuit of their mission and moved by the many donors who made pledges the first day and who came back in the following weeks.

In the following months, the results became clearer and quantifiable. On September 11, we not only collected five times the amount of blood normally collected in a day, but in

the following week we collected three times the average. There were many young and new donors. The overtime cost for the first week ran over \$50,000 more than normal.

Overall, SMF lost about \$1 million as a result of the events of 9-11. Our loss was not through the destruction of excess blood collection, as happened at other blood collection agencies. SMF's expirations normally run around one percent. Our post 9-11 rate was less than two percent at 42 days, which is the shelf life of a unit of blood.

SMF has, for some time, shared its extra blood and blood products with many areas, primarily New York City. (One reason we were able to get resources to New York that terrible day was that we had this long-term relationship.)

With the outpouring of donor support nationwide, national blood inventories swelled to rarely seen levels. Since no appreciable need arose from this tragedy, restriction of subsequent collections was necessary. We rely on the additional income from excess supply to supplement local hospital service fees. With no demonstrated need to collect extra blood for almost three months, collections were cut back to 60 percent of normal. Knowing that the demand for blood would resume, we only reduced expenses during the wait by 15 percent. The additional expenses plus the revenue loss led to the \$1 million shortfall.

One of our basic tenets is that we are a community service. We reaffirmed that tenet in our response to 9-11; we carried out our mission, "providing blood services to those in need."

We gave the opportunity to thousands of donors to fulfill their need to perform a community service, to provide blood for those in need. When asked to return another time because of the volume of donors, one emotional donor summed up what many others felt, "You don't understand. I have to do this; it's the only way I can help!"

As a result of the financial loss from 9-11, the SMF Board of Trustees implemented a fee increase to ensure financial viability. Should revenues exceed required levels, I am committed to return the excess to our hospital customers.

As a physician for almost four decades and a blood banker for just slightly less, I expect dedication and devotion in the pursuit of healing. I found those qualities alive and well at the Foundation. I hesitate to invoke Winston Churchill, but this was our "finest hour."

In January, our Board of Trustees voted to adopt the name BloodSource. Why change our name now? The most compelling reasons for the change are:

- Service area growth (Oregon border through Merced County; Vacaville to Nevada state line) outgrew the geographic context of Sacramento;
- Consolidation of 15 different location names into one;
- Difficulty with "branding"; and
- "Confusion of "SMF" with Sutter Medical Foundation.

The corporate name will continue as Sacramento Medical Foundation but we will be doing business as BloodSource. The new name has been well received by staff and volunteers, and this "branding" should establish BloodSource as an international leader in blood banking and transfusion medicine.

Finally, I am happy to report that after six years of financial losses and the significant loss in the months after 9-11, we have now experienced 5 out of 6 months of positive results. We should have a positive bottom line by April 1, 2002, and Fiscal 2001-2002 should remain in the black.

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