



BLOOD CONNECTS, DONORS UNITE

- Singapore Red Cross and the Health Sciences Authority come together to honour 1,450 champion blood donors
- Award recipients range from the youngest at 24 years old to the oldest at 70 years old
- This year marks the 70th year of Singapore's National Blood Programme

Singapore, 4 June 2015 – More than 11,000 people gathered to celebrate this year's new batch of blood donor champions. A sense of community is what binds Singapore together and this was clearly reflected in the passion and commitment of the donor champions as well as those who came down to support them.

To mark the occasion and honour the 1,450 champion blood donors, Guest of Honour **Ms Grace Fu, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth** said, "When we help a fellow human being by donating our blood, we become part of a community larger than ourselves. This sense of shared responsibility will make Singapore a more caring and cohesive society. As demand for blood will continue to rise, I hope that all of us will step forward to give to those in need."

Blood donors are the backbone of Singapore's National Blood Programme which turns 70 this year. Started during the post-World War II era, the National Blood Programme continues to help the country meet its blood needs.

In the last seven decades, the programme has transformed from its humble beginnings of one mobile bus and manual processes to its current form. The adoption of modern blood banking technology has made testing more comprehensive and efficient for safer blood; the setting up of four blood donation centres and mobile blood drives have made blood donation more convenient and accessible; the focus on improving the donor experience has led to shortened waiting and donation time - these factors all play a critical role in ensuring a safe and sufficient blood supply for Singapore.

But what has remained constant is the spirit of giving. The selfless and dedicated efforts of the blood donors over the years have made a big difference in the lives of those who need it the most. In 2015, blood donors supported transfusions for more than 28,000 people.

Singapore needs an estimated 120,000 units of blood this year, or about 400 units every day and 16 units every hour. As our population increases, so will our blood needs.

According to **Mr Tee Tua Ba, Chairman, Singapore Red Cross**, "The number of blood donors has increased by 39% in the last decade as more people are coming forward to donate blood. But we can all collectively do more. This is why we are always looking at innovative ways to engage the youths and inculcate the habit of donating blood from early on. Today, youth make up 28% of all blood donors; we hope to increase this to 35%".

TOUCHED BY A LIFE EXPERIENCE



An inspiring individual who knows first-hand the impact of donating blood is recipient-turned-donor Mr Koh Wee Jin who was awarded the bronze award. The father of one was diagnosed with dengue haemorrhagic fever when he was 8 years old and had urgently needed a blood transfusion to survive.

“Throughout the whole incident, I had to stay in the ICU for 14 days and required 9 bags of blood. It was a traumatic experience for my family, especially my mother as I recall the doctor telling her that my internal organs were bleeding and that I might not make it through it the night. She was devastated by the news as she was taking care of my grandfather who was diagnosed with prostate cancer during the same period of time. After I got married, I realised that family unity is something that everyone treasures. By donating blood and saving lives, I can potentially help someone save their family member.”

Another man who is touched by how blood donations have saved him, is the oldest champion donor at 70 years old, Mr Massang Roland Zavier. “About 50 years ago, I was involved in a serious road accident and had injured my arm severely. The incident served as a wakeup call, as I realised how precious life is. Since then, I’ve pledged to seize all opportunities and play my part in giving back to the community by being a donor.” Since the inception of his blood donation journey, Mr Massang has made a total of 76 blood donations, and inspired seven of his friends to become blood donors as well.

In recent years, Singapore Red Cross has also turned their focus on youths to create a new generation of donors in order to meet Singapore’s future blood demands. Ongoing efforts such as school outreach, social initiatives and mobile apps and games have already been put in place to educate and raise awareness of the importance blood donation.

24 years old, Ms Abigail is the youngest champion donor this year. Abigail has been donating since she reached the eligible donor age of 16 and was awarded the Bronze award for donating blood 25 times. Inspired by her mother who is also a fellow Bronze award recipient this year, Abigail has continued to be diligent with her donation efforts.

“Donating blood has become a part of my lifestyle because I value the importance of doing my part to help sustain a healthy blood bank by donating regularly. I am committed to donating blood regularly in order to save lives and contribute back to the society,” said Abigail whose brother is also a regular blood donor.

RECRUITING NEW BLOOD

A rapidly ageing population together with the rising chronic disease burden means more people would require complex surgical procedures, which in turn increases the demand for blood. Apart from the elderly, others who require blood transfusions include road traffic accident victims, cancer patients, and patients with blood disorders.

Currently, only 1.8% of Singapore’s residential population contributes to the national blood supply. The demand for blood is increasing by 3-5% annually. It is estimated that blood donations have to be expanded by almost two-fold, which is about 220,000 units of blood by 2030 to meet future blood demand.



In the recent years, the Singapore Red Cross has been focusing on recruiting youth donors. Awareness programmes, including social media engagement and mobile apps, have been introduced to foster the habit of blood donation from a young age. These ongoing efforts aim to ensure that the spirit of giving is inculcated in the current and future generations of Singaporeans in order to sustain Singapore's blood donor pool, which in turn fulfils the national blood transfusion needs.

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About World Blood Donor Day

World Blood Donor Day is dedicated to individuals who voluntarily and regularly donate their blood to help save lives. It also aims to create wider awareness of the importance of voluntary blood donation and encourage more people to become regular blood donors. This year's theme is *blood connects us all* which highlights blood as the common thread that connects our community of blood donors. Worldwide, at least 90 million units of blood are donated each year to save lives. 62 countries have achieved 100 per cent voluntary blood donation, up from 39 in 2002. In Singapore, blood donation is 100 per cent voluntary and non-remunerated. Through the World Blood Donor Day, we reiterate the importance of voluntary blood donation and recognise the altruistic contributions of our blood donors. Most importantly, we want to encourage more people, especially the younger ones, to make blood donation an integral part of their lives.

The annual World Blood Donor Day is sponsored by four international organisations: The World Health Organisation (WHO), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Federation of Blood Donor Organisations and the International Society of Blood Transfusion.

For more information, please visit <http://www.who.int/worldblooddonorday>

About the Singapore Red Cross Blood Donor Recruitment Programme

The Singapore Red Cross (SRC) was appointed the National Blood Donor Recruiter in April 2001. Together with our partner-in-service, the Blood Services Group of the Health Sciences Authority, we aim to collect sufficient safe blood for the transfusion needs of all our hospitals.

The SRC focuses on three main functions in the National Blood Programme:

- Recruitment, Retention and Recognition of blood donors
- Promotion and Education to increase public awareness on the importance of blood donation
- Organisation of mobile blood donation drives in the community

About HSA's Blood Services Group



The HSA's Blood Services Group, as the national blood service, secures the nation's blood supply by ensuring a safe and adequate blood supply. It is responsible for collecting, processing, testing and distributing blood and blood products to all hospitals in Singapore. It also provides specialist transfusion medicine services in immunohaematology and tissue typing and is actively engaged in the cutting-edge therapeutic research area of cell therapy.