

Blood Donation Program in Malaysia: Government Initiatives towards Attracting Volunteer Blood Donors

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Abstract

Millions of people need blood because of many reasons such as accidents, routine surgeries, treatment of serious diseases such as cancer and thalassemia. In many countries, the availability of blood product depends on a small number of volunteer donors, including Malaysia. Present trends in blood collection and capacity usage in Malaysia have raised concerns about the ability to meet potential needs. To ensure an adequate blood supply in health facilities is a challenging task for the government especially Ministry of Health Malaysia. It is important to develop a program with influential initiatives that can help to boost public interest and willingness to involve in blood donation program. This study aims to identify and examine the initiatives conducted by the government in order to attract the interest of public to become volunteer blood donor. This study identified that there were five main initiatives implemented by the government to attract public to donate blood, namely: (a) intensive advertising (via mainstream television and radio channels); (b) mobile blood transfusion service center; (c) incentives to blood donors; (d) establishments of donation suites, and; (e) collaboration with other government institution for blood donation campaign. Although current situation showed significant changes in terms of public awareness and willingness towards this program, but there are rooms for improvement for the government to consider in maintaining the balance between blood supply and demand in the country. Focusing on public to register, as frequent or repeated volunteer blood donor, is obviously one of the main available option that current situation need to strengthen.

Keywords: Blood Donation, Blood Donor, Government Initiatives, Government Program and Policy, Malaysia.

1. Introduction

Annually, millions of people need blood because of many reasons such as accidents, routine surgeries, treatment of serious diseases such as cancer and thalassemia (Sinar Harian, 2017). In many countries, the availability of blood product depends on a small number of volunteer donors (Godin et al, 2007), including Malaysia. Present trends in blood collection and capacity usage in Malaysia have raised concerns about the ability to meet potential needs. Many health facilities have faced critical amount of blood supply and few of them reported to have blood supply below of the reserve target (Berita Harian, 2017).

In average, around 2,000 blood bags are needed every day to meet the needs of the patients nationwide. In year 2015, only 2.2 percent or roughly around 660,000 out of 30 million people in Malaysia came forward to donate blood. This amount is still low if compared to the demand of blood product in Malaysia (Harian Metro, 2015). Based on Malaysian perspective, there were many reasons why the number of blood donors in Malaysia is still short. Among the reasons were negative perception to donate blood (Harian Metro, 2015), low awareness on blood donation (Borneo Post Online, 2017) and misconceptions and myths of blood donation such as increase or decrease body weight, infectious diseases can be contracted through blood donation, time consuming and lack of awareness and knowledge on donating blood (Ministry of Health, 2016). All these reasons have pushed away the interest of public to become volunteer blood donor.

Eventually, meeting the blood product demands is difficult to achieve.

Overall, it can be said that ensuring an adequate blood supply in health facilities is a very challenging task for the government especially Ministry of Health Malaysia. It is important to design and implement influential programs in order to boost public interest and willingness to involve in blood donation program. Based on this argument, this paper aims to identify and examine the current initiatives conducted by the government in attracting the interest of public to donate blood.

2. Literature Review

The number of blood donors in Malaysia is becoming greater compare to previous year (Berita Harian, 2018). This shows that Ministry of Health through its agency, National Blood Centre and with collaboration from outside agencies and non-government organizations, somehow has successfully implemented programs and promotion to get more people to donate. Despite the increase number of blood donors, Malaysia is still considered facing a critical shortage due to the rising of population number and demand (Seong et al, 2014). The fact that Malaysia growth of number in blood donors is from the repeat donors instead of new recruited blood donors. The decreasing of new blood donors also will affect the national demand for blood. This shows that, new blood donors play one of the major factor besides of demand and population rising.

According to World Health Organization (2016), stated that in order to full filled the blood demand, 4.6% out of the population

should come forward as a donor but only 22.5% who altruistically be as a donors. (Ling et al, 2018). Therefore, attempts to recruit more donors to create large pool of blood donors are important in maintaining the blood supply over time especially during festive seasons since low turnout of donor during festive seasons, will cause the blood shortage (News Straits Times, 2011). Besides that, it is essential that the government, who must play a bigger role in this issue, to recruit and maintain donors who are loyal, which can guarantee a constant donation over time with quality and safe blood products (Alferi, 2017). According to Stoker and Mosely (2010), it is pertinent to understand what motivates people to be blood donor and what influence their behavior towards having intention and willingness to donate blood. It is a central for policy making.

Besides that, Bednall et al (2013) also proposed that donation intentions were closely associated with three behavioral factors, which are donation behavior, perceived behavioral control and attitudes. These reflect the donors' decision to donate (Azjen, 1991). These three factors are seemingly can be influenced through government intervention in terms of promoting blood donation through it programs and activities (Godin et al, 2011). However, fail to address complexities and challenges in the implementation of policy and strategies regarding blood donation will make the blood donation program within a particular country difficult to achieve it aims, mainly on increasing the blood reserve and to attract more blood donors (Mosely and Stoker, 2013). Nevertheless, it is important to have a specific program and policy for blood donation, as guideline and direction for catering the social needs. This to ensure that the country has something to act in order to make sure the blood reserve can meet the needs. In doing so, the country can maintain its progress towards achieving the objective to have more blood donors to voluntarily donate blood.

3. Research Methodology

This qualitative study employed searching and reviewing government documents and reports as well as other literature sources. All the collected data was reviewed critically to identify the Malaysian's government initiatives in implementing blood donation program within the country from year 2013 until 2018. The collection of data and information not only consisted of government's initiatives alone, but also took into consideration from other non-government organizations that collaborated and cooperated with the government bodies to implement blood donation program in their organizations.

4. Results and Discussions

There were few initiatives implemented by the government to attract public to donate blood, namely:

4.1. Intensive Advertising

Blood donation program in Malaysia seemed to depending on public to become the volunteer to donate blood. In order to attract them, first, it is important to create awareness among the public about blood donation. The Ministry of Health has put efforts on doing promotions suing mainstream media such as television and radio channels.

Besides that, they are also, together with their collaborator to do promotion using social media such as through Facebook, Instagram and twitter. For example the National Blood Center website and social media (Facebook). This has helped not only to maintain the experienced blood donors to continuously support the program, but also to recruit the new blood donors. Previous studies also argued that online social media can significantly contributes to influence public towards donation (Sura et al, 2017)

and other related health problems (Khan et al, 2017; Rusaert et al., 2014; Gasper et al, 2014). Besides providing public with the knowledge of donating blood, the public also will know about current situation of blood product reserve in our country, whereby it was reported that the current reserve is still inadequate (Kosmo Online, 2018; Ngah, 2017).

4.2. Mobile Blood Transfusion Service Center

Having physical building for blood transfusion center is good, as the ministry has proper location to manage almost everything about blood management. The main center currently was built in Kuala Lumpur and named as Pusat Darah Negara (National Blood Center). Besides that, almost every hospital in Malaysia has the similar function of blood transfusion center. Although the government has this kind of facility, the government also took another extra initiative to attract more and more people to become blood donor. Therefore, the government came out with the idea of mobile blood transfusion service center. This mobile service center can be used during their blood donation campaign tournament nationwide (Ministry of Health, 2012). It is good to have this kind of facility as it helps to collect more blood products from the public especially if the location were far away from the fixed service center building. Other than that, rather than waiting for the donors to come, it is also a good idea to go to the blood donors by themselves.

4.3. Establishments of Donation Suites

Another new initiative taken by Ministry of Health is establishing donation suites situated in Mid Valley Megamall, Kuala Lumpur (Mims Today, 2016; Mohamed, 2016) This is one of a kind of blood donation center in Malaysia, where it is the first time in Malaysia to have this suite for donating blood purpose. Perhaps, this idea could be expand to another area or to another shopping center throughout Malaysia. Shopping mall center is a place that receives huge number of visitor everyday especially during weekends and public holiday. It is a brilliant strategy to have this kind of suite to welcome public to become blood donor without having effort to go the provided center. Instead, the public can go to the suite before or after having fun time at the shopping malls.

Table 1: List of advantage received by the blood donors

Donation frequency	Treatment benefit
1 time	Free outpatient treatment and medical treatment (excluding x-ray and operation payment) and second class ward for 4 months
2 times (within 12 months)	Free Hepatitis B injection
2 to 5 times	Free outpatient treatment and medical treatment and second class ward for 4 months
6 to 10 times	Free outpatient treatment for 1 year and medical treatment and second class ward for 6 months
11 – 15 times	Free outpatient treatment for 2 year and medical treatment and second class ward for 1 year
16 – 20 times	Free outpatient treatment and medical treatment and second class ward for 2 years
21 – 30 times	Free outpatient treatment and medical treatment and second class ward for 3 years
31 – 40 times	Free outpatient treatment and medical treatment and first class ward for 4 years
41 – 50 times	Free outpatient treatment and medical treatment and first class ward for 6 years
More than 50 times (for Whole Blood donors) and more than 150 time (for apheresis donors)	Free outpatient treatment and medical treatment and first class ward for 10 years and eligible to receive second class ward for entire life after ending the 10 years of first class ward term

4.4. Incentives to Blood Donors

Blood donors are encouraged to be a volunteer without expect any return or reward from the good deeds they have given. However, the Ministry of Health has implemented an initiative by providing some benefits to the volunteer blood donor. All the benefits will receive by the donor based on the specific criteria that was set by Ministry of Health (National Blood Center, 2018). Table 1 shows the list of benefit that will receive by the volunteer blood donors.

4.5. Collaboration with Other Government Institution for Blood Donation Campaign.

Blood donation program has drawn a lot of attention from various non-government organizations (NGOs) to be part of the program voluntarily (Achariam, 2017). Usually the campaign will be held at various venues such as government institution buildings, shopping complexes, education institutions, residential areas, religious centers and other public places (The Star Online, 2018). The campaign usually co-hosted between National Blood Centre with the interested NGOs, independent bodies and institutions. Furthermore, National Blood Centre also welcomes any agencies to work with them in the campaign. The center provided a channel for those who are interested to apply for blood donation campaign or program in their areas. Anybody who is interested to apply for holding the program, they may contact the center for further inquiry and action.

5. Conclusions and Recommendation

Although current situation showed significant changes in terms of public awareness and willingness towards blood donation program, but there are rooms for improvement for the government to consider in maintaining the balance between blood supply and demand in the country. Focusing on public to register, as frequent or repeated volunteer blood donor, is obviously one of the main available option that current situation need to strengthen. Besides that, the government should encourage the new blood donors to become the regular one by offering them with several non-monetary rewards such as free full health examination for every year, health insurance scheme with one-year coverage or perhaps include their immediate family members and provide payment discount for any health services they receive in government and non-government health centers. For example, in the United States of America, blood donors were recruited with the use of rewards or incentive such as giving a t-shirts, event tickets and opportunity drawings for televisions and expensive cars as well as a chance to win a gift card for shopping that sometime valued up until \$1000. While, in European Countries, such as in Finland, Republic of Yugoslavia, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom, blood donors are exclusively voluntary, non-remunerated and have not received any particular incentive (Abolghasemi, Hosseini-Divkalayi and Seighali, 2010). However, some other European countries such as Greece, Macedonia and Romania have provided incentives to blood donors in terms one or more day off work, travel expenses, tax relief and other material gifts (Abolghasemi, Hosseini-Divkalayi and Seighali, 2010). Some scholars argued that rewarding or giving incentives to blood donor might have negative effect, but it is still a huge concern to make sure the blood products are available all the time required. It depends on the creativity and the capability of the government on how they should direct the blood donation program to strengthen it to become voluntary non-remunerated blood donation program.

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