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MORE SOUTH AFRICANS URGED TO DONATE BLOOD

Less than 1% of eligible South Africans are regular blood donors

13 June 2013: In order to meet the demand for blood in South Africa, the South African National Blood Service (SANBS) must collect an average of 3 000 units of blood a day. However, while one unit of blood can save up to three lives, the fact is that less than 1% of eligible South Africans are regular blood donors.

Ahead of World Blood Donor Day on the 14th of June 2013, Dr Dominique Stott, Executive: Medical Standards and Services at PPS, says all eligible South Africans should participate in regular blood donation. “It is a quick and painless procedure that can save the lives of many fellow citizens.”

“A donor can donate blood every 56 days, but because blood lasts only 42 days after donation, regular donors are essential for sustainability, as there are far fewer donors than recipients, resulting in blood always being in short supply. It is vital not to view a donation as a once-off exercise.”

Dr Stott says blood donation is a safe procedure. “One cannot get AIDS from donating blood because all needles and fingerprick lancets are new, sterile and used only once. After use, each lancet and needle is placed in a special medical-waste container and incinerated. Trained staff collect all blood donations and very strict protocols are followed to ensure that all blood donation procedures are safe and hygienic.”

According to Vanessa Raju, Communications Manager at the SANBS, the decision to become a safe blood donor means that a person commits to participating in a vital community service that ultimately improves the quality of life for many patients in need.

“It is an honour to be able to help save lives, but not everybody can become a blood donor. The South African National Blood Service (SANBS) has various measures in place to protect the health and wellbeing of both blood donors and patients and these measures ensure that our blood supply is among the safest in the world.”

To become a safe blood donor persons must:

- Weigh at least 50kg
- Be between the ages of 16 and 65
- Be in good health
- Lead a sexually safe lifestyle
- Consider your blood safe for transfusion to a patient
- Commit to donating blood regularly

Raju says donated blood is used for many purposes. “Approximately 27% of donated blood goes towards medical cases e.g. cancer treatment; 26% is used for childbirth & gynaecological cases; 21% is used for surgical cases e.g. cardiac surgery; 10% goes towards paediatric cases e.g. leukaemia; 6% is used in orthopaedic cases e.g. hip replacements; 6% goes towards research; and 4% is used for casualty: e.g. trauma patients.”

Dr Stott advises that the entire process takes about 30 minutes and the donor’s body replaces all the fluid within 24 hours through fluid intake, with no health side effects.

“The need for blood never stops, so it is important that we use initiatives such as the Blood Donor Day to highlight the importance of donating in order to save lives and donate whenever possible.”

There are various locations throughout South Africa in all major provinces for people to donate blood as well as mobile blood donation drives. All dates, locations and further information can be found on the SANBS website at www.sanbs.org.za.