

Blood banks must stop relying on Skid Row bums

BY STUART AUERBACH
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WASHINGTON — The federal government has warned the nation's bloodbanks to develop a system to provide enough safe blood for all Americans without buying it from skid row bums, a major source of disease in blood transfusions.

If not, federal officials told a White House health seminar this month the Administration will seek legislation setting up a nationalized blood supply system.

"For too long we have endured our present haphazard nonsystem of blood supply, with its sporadic shortages across the country," said Dr. Henry Simmons, deputy assistant Secretary of Health in the Department of Health Education and Welfare. "There is no overall shortage of blood, just widespread mismanagement of this vital national resource."

The new national blood policy was

revealed by HEW Secretary Caspar Weinberger, who said it is aimed at creating "an all-voluntary system of blood . . . (which) would go far toward eliminating the threat of hepatitis transmitted by blood from unhealthy donors."

About 16 per cent of the nearly 9 million pints of blood collected each year is bought from commercial donors, many of whom are unhealthy and who come from low income slum and skid row groups. "This blood," an HEW report said, "accounts for about 25 to 40 per cent of post-transfusion hepatitis because commercial donors present a relatively high risk of transmitting hepatitis."

HEW estimated that 17,000 cases of hepatitis are caused each year by transfusions and 850 of them result in death. Another 100,000 cases never show up clinically.

This costs the nation, HEW said, an estimated \$6 million a year. "Transition to an all-voluntary system should produce

savings of at least \$18 million to \$29 million annually in reduced illnesses and death from post-transfusion hepatitis alone," HEW said.

The government also wants the blood banks to set up regional systems to exchange blood between hospitals and supply stations in an effort to avoid wastage. Simmons estimated that one-fourth of all the blood collected for transfusion is wasted through outdated; blood has 21 days' shelf life before it can no longer be used for transfusions.

Simmons explained that the government decided not to nationalize the blood system until the four-pronged blood banking complex—the Red Cross (collecting 40 per cent of the blood), community blood banks (29 per cent), hospitals (18 per cent) and commercial blood banks (11 per cent)—had five months to come up with a program of its own.

To reinforce the government's carrot and stick approach, Secretary Weinberger said he will call a meeting of blood banking interests next month "to hammer out the specific steps we must take to insure an adequate supply of high quality blood, blood products and services."

This will entail getting the different parts of the blood banking complex, who are often at odds with each other, to begin working together for the first time.

Shoppers asked views on pizza, lard, deodorants

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comments on the Agriculture Department's proposal to modify its standard for some ingredients used in lard. The proposal would permit use of cured or cooked pork tissues or both in preparation of lard as well as fat rendered from bones. The proposal would also establish quality standards for grading new lard. Write to Hearing Clerk, Agriculture Department, Washington, D.C. 20250.

—Feminine deodorant sprays. Aug. 20 is the deadline for comments on Food and Drug Administration's proposal to require special warning labels on sprays. Consumer Reports and physicians claim that sprays cause adverse reactions, such as itching, burning and infections. Send comments to Hearing Clerk, Health, Education and Welfare Department, Fishers Lane, Rockville, Md. 20852.

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