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'Donate' for dollars; it pays to give plasma

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By VALERIE LINGG-KANGAIL
Of the Emerald

The crowded waiting room looks like any well-established health clinic with a diverse clientele — working people, students, and the unemployed. Although new clients are directed into a screening room for a medical interview and physical check-up by a doctor, they are not here to receive medical treatment — they are here to donate plasma and earn money for their donation. We want to avoid the stereotype of plasma donor centers and the sort of person who comes to donate plasma," says Kim Bedell, manager of the Eugene Plasma Corp. at 1071 Olive St.

Bedell says many people think only transients and drifters come to the center to pick up a few easy dollars.

"We are running a professional center with strict check-up procedures on potential donors," she says, "and you really can't stereotype the people who donate plasma."

"We get all types of people," adds assistant manager Bonnie Jordan. "A lot of people come in during a break from their jobs to pick up extra cash for bills."

She says donors can earn \$10 a visit for approximately an hour of their time.

Jordan says a potential donor must call about a week in advance to make an appointment for a medical interview. She stresses that a donor must be healthy, and she cites several reasons for rejection of an applicant — hepatitis, homemade tattoos, rheumatic fever, or a pregnancy within the last six months. Nursing mothers also are rejected.

"If a person comes in and smells of alcohol or drugs, we give them a warning and tell them to come back in several days," Jordan says. "If they come back a second time in the same condition, we reject them."

She says donor centers must adhere to stringent federal regulations under the Food and Drug Administration, and the centers are inspected annually.

Following the medical interview, the applicant sees a doctor for a brief medical exam. The doctor explains the process of extracting plasma before the applicant signs the donor consent form.

Jordan explains that the plasma is the liquified part of the blood composed of 90 percent water and 10 percent protein. She says donating plasma is not as dramatic to the system as donating blood, because the

red cells are returned to the donor's bloodstream after the plasma is removed.

The body replenishes plasma within 48 hours, so a person can donate two times a week, Jordan says, adding that the center keeps an updated chart on each donor.

Chris Roels, a second-year University law student, says he went to the donor center in June to earn money while looking for a job. After taking the medical exam, Roels was told his veins were too small, and that the plasma-extraction process might put too much strain on them.

"It showed me that the staff wouldn't take just anyone for their plasma with disregard for their health," Roels says.

The 15-member staff at the Eugene Plasma Corp. includes a physician, a paramedic, and eight phlebotomists, who are trained to draw the blood to extract the plasma.

Jordan says the plasma is frozen before shipment to Cutter Laboratory in Berkeley, Calif., where it is processed into a variety of medical uses. The Eugene Plasma Corp. obtains approximately 350 to 400 litres of plasma a week, she says.

Plasma generally is used as clotting element for hemophiliacs, and fluid for burn victims, Jordan says. The plasma also is used for research. Researchers are currently investigating plasma in anti-cancer medications, she says.

The Eugene Plasma Corp., which opened in June 1978, is owned by North American Biological Inc. of Miami, Fla., a business that owns 19 similar centers throughout the country.

"Eugene has a high rate of unemployment and a large student population," Bedell says, "so it's a good place to locate."

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