



# Right Patient, Right Blood

## Factsheet for Healthcare Staff

### Why is it so important to check a patient's identity before a blood transfusion?

The transfusion of blood which is not matched to a patient's own blood can cause a potentially fatal reaction. Annual reports from the Serious Hazards of Transfusion (SHOT) scheme demonstrate that this is one of the biggest hazards to a patient from a blood transfusion. In the 2011 SHOT Annual report, 35 wrong blood incidents occurred in the clinical area.<sup>1</sup>

The Department of Health now classify both the misidentification of patients and transfusion of ABO-incompatible blood components as 'Never Events'<sup>2</sup> i.e. unacceptable and eminently preventable.

You can prevent incompatible transfusions by ensuring a carefully identified blood sample from the patient is sent for matching, and subsequent transfusion of the right blood to the right patient at the right time.

### What's the most effective way to confirm a patient's identity?

Ask the patient to state their full name and date of birth, and check their identification band before taking a blood sample.

Before giving a blood transfusion, you must ask the patient again to confirm their identity and carefully check this against their identification band. This **MUST** be done at the bedside, before the transfusion is started. Both the patient and the unit of blood must be carefully identified. These strict checking procedures **MUST** be followed before every transfusion.

### Do all in-patients really need to wear an identification band?

Yes, this is a national requirement – National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) Safer Practice Notice 11 (2005) 'Wristbands for hospital in-patients improve safety'<sup>3</sup> states that all patients must wear an identification band as soon as they are admitted to hospital and throughout their stay.

### What should I do if a patient doesn't have an identification band?

Confirm the patient's details with them (or follow local guidance for establishing identity if the patient is unable to communicate) and obtain and put on an identification band. If a patient's identification band needs to be removed, e.g. to facilitate a medical procedure, *it is the responsibility of the person who removed it to ensure that it is replaced immediately the opportunity arises.*

### What about those who are outpatients – do they need an identification band?

Not usually. However, it is still important that you ask the patient to state their full name and date of birth before taking any blood samples or undertaking any other procedures. If the patient has communication difficulties refer to local guidelines on how to establish identity.

### What about 'day case' patients, do they need an identification band?

Day case patients should wear an identification band at all times. Some hospitals issue photographic identity badges to patients who attend regularly; the patient should wear them at all times. You should still ask the patient to state their full name and date of birth before taking any blood samples and before a blood transfusion.

## Some patients have been coming to the hospital for years and we all know them. Do we really need to ask them their details?

Yes, it is very important to do this. You may know them, but you don't know the bag of blood that may be given to them.

## What happens if patients are unable to confirm their own identity?

You must still carry out careful identity checks and will rely particularly on checking the identification band, along with a detailed investigation to establish the patient's correct identity. This may include checking with relatives or colleagues, or checking against medical notes. It is essential that you check that the details on the band are both correct and accurate for that patient. Take particular care when patients have the same or similar names.

If the patient does not have an identification band, then it is your responsibility to establish their correct identity (refer to local guidance on how to do this) and put one in place.

In some cases, patients may be unable to wear an identification band for medical reasons. There should be alternative methods for confirming identity in this instance – please refer to your local policy.

## Can the patient's name on the bed be used to check identity?

No. This can be dangerous. If a previous patient's name has not been removed, there could be an identification error.

Similarly, do not identify patients from any documents left by or on the bed. These may relate to another patient and have been left there in error. Always check the patient's identity verbally where possible, and also by carefully reading the identification band.

## A patient challenged me to check her identity. Do they think I can't do my job?

Involving patients in their care can help make it safer. It is perfectly acceptable for them to remind staff to check their identity and they should be encouraged to do so. This helps staff just assuming they have the right patient because some of the details match.

## What should I do if I discover errors when checking a patient's identity?

Errors can occasionally happen – such as wrong spelling of names and addresses; or mishearing of names, dates, and numbers. **Immediately** stop what you are doing and take steps to confirm the patient's details, then put on a correct identification band if necessary. If there will be some delay, you may need to return a bag of blood to controlled storage.

Ensure you also inform other departments, e.g. the transfusion laboratory, of such incidents and give them full details. You should also report such incidents/risks via your local clinical governance systems.

## Why do hospitals in Wales check the first line of the patient's address as well as their full name and date of birth?

This is a requirement of the Welsh healthcare system, but does not apply to the other countries in the UK.

### References

- 1 SHOT Annual Report 2011 [www.shotuk.org](http://www.shotuk.org)
- 2 The never-events list 2012/13 [www.dh.gov.uk/health/2012/01/never-events-update/](http://www.dh.gov.uk/health/2012/01/never-events-update/)
- 3 National Patient Safety Agency Safer Practice Notice 11 (2005) [www.nrls.npsa.nhs.uk/resources/?entryid45=59799&q=0%c2%acwristbands%c2%ac](http://www.nrls.npsa.nhs.uk/resources/?entryid45=59799&q=0%c2%acwristbands%c2%ac)

