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Central Blood Bank
Five Parkway Center
Pittsburgh, PA 15220

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Virginia Blood Services
2825 Emerywood Parkway
Richmond, VA 23294

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317 Enterprise Way
Pittston, PA 18640

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SPECIAL
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INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Therapeutic Phlebotomy



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What is therapeutic phlebotomy?

Therapeutic phlebotomy is a blood draw procedure usually prescribed by a physician as part of a treatment of various medical conditions associated with accumulation of excess iron in the body. Common examples of such conditions are hemochromatosis, porphyrias and polycythemia. The procedure involves donation of a unit (about 500 cc) of blood on a regular basis. The blood draw stimulates the body to make new red blood cells, which require iron. Therefore, the process depletes the iron stores in the body as new red blood cells are made.

What diseases are treated with therapeutic phlebotomy?

The three most common reasons for phlebotomy are:

- Hereditary Hemochromatosis (HH)—a disorder of the way the body uses iron. The body absorbs too much of the iron found in the foods we eat. This extra iron is stored in the body, mainly in the liver, pancreas and skin, which leads to cirrhosis of the liver, diabetes, enlarged heart with congestive heart failure, irregular heart beat and increased skin pigmentation
- Polycythemia—an increase in the number of circulating red blood cells and total blood volume
- Porphyrias—metabolic disorders associated with hepatosplenomegaly (enlargement of the spleen and liver), photosensitivity (sensitivity to light), pigmentation and distinct red color in the urine

How often can therapeutic phlebotomies be performed?

As often as every few days may be needed to improve the symptoms of the blood disorder. Phlebotomies may be scheduled on a regular basis, such as monthly, or as needed in response to the symptoms of the disease after the initial desired results are reached.

What are the requirements for therapeutic phlebotomy?

A physician order including the amount of blood to be withdrawn, the frequency of donation, and the desired hemoglobin level are required. A health history and mini-physical are done, and consent for phlebotomy is given.

Can blood collected from people diagnosed with blood disorders be transfused to patients?

Most cannot, but in 1999 the FDA approved that the blood from people with hereditary hemochromatosis posed no greater risk than blood obtained from volunteer blood donors—provided the patient meets all screening and testing requirements. A similar approval was granted by the FDA in 2014 for donors on testosterone in need of phlebotomy for secondary polycythemia, a side effect of the drug.

Are there extra charges for therapeutic blood?

No, there are no additional charges to the patient or the donor for therapeutic phlebotomies if the donation is collected and processed by an ITxM blood center.

Therapeutic phlebotomies are dependent on:

- A physician's order—this must be received by the Special Donations Department prior to the recipient calling to register as a therapeutic patient
- Appointments—Therapeutic phlebotomies are made by appointment only at any of our community donor centers
- The patient—is responsible for ensuring that all he/she calls the Special Donations Department to schedule their appointments

Protocol for therapeutic phlebotomy donors:

All therapeutic phlebotomy patients must have an order on file in the Special Donations Department.

Regulatory requirements mandates all orders must:

- Be renewed annually
- Have minimum Hgb of 11.0 mg/dL
- Indicate the bleed frequency
- Indicate the bleed volume

Physicians are required to provide licensing information when completing the form.