

**SUPPORT**  
**SPECIALIZED**  
**MEDICAL SERVICES**  
**IN IRAQ**



IMPROVING QUALITY,  
ACCESS & UTILIZATION OF  
**BLOOD**  
TRANSFUSION SERVICES IN IRAQ



## Simple Acts, Make Big Difference

The Programme to support Specialized Medical Services in Iraq (SMS), which puts emphasis on strengthening Emergency Medical Services and Blood Transfusion Services, was developed in response to priority needs expressed by the Government of Iraq (GOI). The programme is being implemented utilizing funds provided by the European Union and covers all the 18 governorates.

The overall programme objectives are to:

- Improve quality, efficiency and standards of Emergency Medical Services and Blood Transfusion Services
- Minimize the health consequences of emergencies, crises and conflicts and reduce the number of avoidable deaths and the long term impact of disabilities
- Increase GOI capacity for preparedness and timely response to emergencies



Improving quality access & utilization of Blood Transfusion Services in Iraq

### The Blood Transfusion Services (BTS) component of the programme aims at:

- Develop a BTS national Policies, strategies, regulations, guidelines and standards
- Rehabilitate selected regional blood banks and network them with the National Blood transfusion Center (NBTC) and provide state of art equipment and supplies
- Improve quality and safety assurance in BTS
- Establish an effective Donor Recruitment Programme
- Provide specialized training for management and technical staff
- Expand safe blood practices to underserved areas

The BTS component focusses on ensuring that needs for blood transfusion for the most vulnerable segments of the population, particularly those in special needs such as patients that require emergency medical care (i.e. victims of road accident, pregnant women, etc...) are met in a timely fashion.

In developing countries, such population groups, together with children, are particularly vulnerable to blood shortages but also to blood transmissible infections such as HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C through use of unsafe blood.



about 25% of pregnant women deaths are caused by severe bleeding during childbirth



You Can Help



Globally, about 25% of pregnant women deaths are caused by severe bleeding during childbirth, making this the most common cause of maternal mortality. Timely, appropriate and safe blood transfusion during and after labor and delivery can make the difference between life and death for many women and their newborns

Therefore, supporting BTS in Iraq will contribute towards achieving 3 important MDGs (MDG 4: Reduce by two thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate; MDG 5: Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio and MDG 6: Combat HIV/AIDS).

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## National Blood Transfusion Programme

The national blood transfusion programme aims at ensuring the availability of safe and sustainable blood supply system for the Iraqi people as an important component of the healthcare system.

The Baghdad based National blood transfusion Center (NBTC) was established in 1959 in order to reform the fragmented hospital based blood supply. The blood transfusion services were then expanded to governorates and currently, there is a blood bank in each governorate that helps to accommodate sufficient supply of blood and blood products to hospitals in their respective population catchment areas. An additional 21 blood collection centers (satellites) and 22 mobile collection units are also available.

In 2009, there were 458,326 blood collections (average of about 14,000/million population), largely from family/ replacement donors.

In order to decentralize the blood transfusion services, the MOH has been engaged in the process of consolidating



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existing hospital blood collection and blood processing laboratories into regional blood transfusion hubs and each one could serve more than one governorate. This process is making steady progress with the establishment of hubs in Basra, Mosul and Najaf. All regional centers are under the supervision of the MoH through the NBTC and at present, there are no private or specific military blood centers.

### Strategic achievements (2010- 2011)

Following the 2008 National Conference on Health Reforms in Iraq, the Government has taken strategic decisions to strengthen health technology related programmes including blood safety. Below is a summary of some of key strategic achievements in the last two years that will gradually contribute to sustainable blood supply and blood safety in Iraq. These achievements include the following:

- Construction of 3 regional blood banks in Basra, Mosul and Najaf in addition to the new regional blood bank in Erbil;
- Revision and implementation of blood safety Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and supporting the development of blood transfusion national policy;
- Training of over 150 health professionals involved in blood



Every blood donor is a hero



transfusion services including managers of blood banks, staff responsible for promoting non-remunerated blood donor programme, laboratory technicians involved in quality testing and quality assurance working in all the blood transfusion centers in Iraq;

- Assessment of the status of blood transfusion services in Kurdistan Region in Iraq by a world blood safety renowned expert and identification of major areas for improvement;
- Through the BTS programme, blood safety has been put high on the national agenda for policy makers and senior officials of the ministry of health.

### Challenges.

Despite the progress already made in strengthening blood transfusion services, there are still challenges faced by the Ministry of health. The list below constitutes few of the most important challenges:

- Addressing the current insufficient funding to modernize the blood transfusion services in terms of infrastructure, human capital and equipment. BTS in Iraq have suffered from decades of neglect;

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- Need to develop a reliable and sustained system of blood collection from only voluntary, non-remunerated, low-risk blood donors;
- Reduction in unnecessary transfusions through the effective clinical use of blood, including addressing current trends of overprescribing and irrational use of blood and blood products by healthcare professionals;
- Need to adapt the curricula of universities and vocational institutions to reflect the new developments in medicine, nursing and medical technologies including blood safety in order to produce a generation of specialists who are technically equipped to handle blood safety issues.

It should be also noted that, as it is the case for all other programmes, the current security situation, despite significant improvements, continues to be a major hindrance to activities aimed at improving the blood transfusion services.



## You Can Help



### Recommendations

The government of Iraq in general and in particular the ministry of health should allocate adequate resources so as to continue the process of strengthening the blood supply and clinical use in Iraq. Such investment will lead to a comprehensive blood safety system with appropriate organization, structure and human resources which will guarantee a safe, efficient, cost-effective and sustainable blood transfusion services that is capable of meeting the needs of patients across the country based on an all voluntary and non-remunerated blood donation system

Capacity building at all levels is paramount and programs need to be developed at under- and post-graduate teaching and training as well continuous professional development (CPD) and focused continued medical education (CME).

Twining the NBTC with other advanced blood transfusion centers in the region, including WHO collaborating centers, such as the Jordan Directorate of Blood Bank.

The MOH to continue to scale up its public awareness campaigns to inform the public of the importance and benefits of non-remunerated blood donation.

**World Blood Donor Day**  
“Every blood donor is a hero” 14 JUNE 2012

On 14 June, countries worldwide celebrate World Blood Donor Day with events to raise awareness of the need for safe blood and blood products and to thank voluntary unpaid blood donors for their life-saving gifts of blood. The theme of the 2012 World Blood Donor Day campaign, “Every blood donor is a hero” focuses on the idea that every one of us can become a hero by giving blood. While recognizing the silent heroes who save lives every day through their blood donations, the theme also strongly encourages more people all over the world to donate blood voluntarily and regularly

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