



OCCUPATIONAL FIRST AID ATTENDANTS ASSOCIATION NEWS

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NOMINATIONS MEETING

November
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The OFAAA Joins the LifeLink Program

By Allan Zdunich

At its meeting in May the Board of Directors of the OFAAA joined the Lifelink Blood Donor Program of the Canadian Blood Services. Board Member Alan Yuen urged the Board to follow his example and encourage our members to participate in LifeLink, a program of friendly competition between community and work groups to promote blood contributions.

When donating blood, participants ask to be recorded as contributors on behalf of their group and Alan registered the OFAAA as a group. Friends and family members may also add their support. Firefighters are active participants in LifeLink, and recently the Surrey Firefighters were recognized for their success.

"Blood, it's in you to give" is the popular slogan associated with blood donations. But blood donations are not without some controversy in Canada. To be accepted as a blood, or blood products donor, one must provide some personal information.

The Canadian Blood Services (CBS) has some strong restrictions on who is eligible to donate blood. These restrictions have generated some criticism from the gay community with accusations of discrimination against gay men. Despite the criticisms, these restrictions are not without a basis; they are a response to the less cautious approach taken by the



CSSE First Aid Competition 2005 - Packaged and ready to go!
Photo courtesy of Elaine Wolfson Kamloops

Red Cross years go. The current restrictions, though, may be due to an overabundance of caution.

BC has to import blood from other provinces

In the 1980's some patients receiving blood transfusions were infected with Hepatitis C due to lack of due diligence by the Red Cross. The Canadian Red Cross had its authority over the blood supply taken away after a federal commission of inquiry (Krever Commission) determined it had not protected Canadians from the risks of infected blood.

The CBS was created in 1998 and from its outset placed restrictions on donors to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C. In 1999, to prevent the spread of both classical Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease and variant C-JD (com-

continued on page5...

INSIDE:

<i>Nominations Meeting</i>	...2
<i>Urban S & R</i>	...3
<i>Discussion Board</i>	...4
<i>Loss of a friend</i>	...5
<i>LifeLink cont.</i>	...6
<i>Discounts</i>	...7
<i>Ski Patrol</i>	...8

*...continued
from front
page*

The OFAAA is a LifeLink member

monly referred to as mad cow disease), some potential donors who had lived in the UK were barred. This was later changed to include France, and then later again to include some other parts of Europe.

Some parts of Africa where AIDS is prevalent were also added, yet Haiti was not. During the summer of 2002 one case of West Nile Virus was transmitted in Canada through a blood transfusion, and ten cases in the US. A screening test was developed by 2003 and donations from the previous year were traced.

To participate today prospective donors must complete a health questionnaire and blood safety form, and be interviewed by a health care practitioner to determine if they are in a risk group. Some of the questionnaire information is available in CBS pamphlets and on the web site www.bloodservices.ca. In BC approximately 15% of potential donors are not accepted because their answers to the questions place them in a risk group.

In 2001 Canadians rushed to donate blood for the US after the World Trade Centre disaster in New York. The rate of donations in the weeks immediately afterwards almost doubled in BC, and nationwide. The CBS has been trying to retain all the new donors and have them contribute regularly because, the demand for blood is expanding faster than the rate of donors.

CBS reported, in 2001, that donations were increasing at 5% annually while demand was increasing at 8%. Nationally the CBS needed to increase its donor base by 40 percent (by the year 2005); from 440,000 to over 600,000. If that did not happen, a lack of donors could cause the delay of needed medical care for thousands of Canadians.

The percentage of Canadians who donate blood by 2004 had only reached 3.7%. Theories that certain ethnic groups are reluctant to donate because of cultural beliefs are questionable since the most commonly identified group, Chinese-Canadians, have a low rate in Canada. Yet, in Taiwan the rate of blood donors is 7.5%.

A recent CBS survey indicated that most Canadians not only overestimate the number of blood donors in Canada, they also fail to act on their intentions to donate blood.

The survey showed that 28% of eligible Canadians say they intend to donate blood in the next year, but in reality less than 4% of them will do so. That number is even lower in BC, where less than 3% of eligible residents donate blood. In fact, the donor rate in BC is so low, that we regularly have to import blood from other provinces. Giving blood only takes about an hour, and is an excellent way to give back to the communities in which we live.

In BC the Lifelink program, by encouraging groups to compete amongst themselves in total donations, will encourage new donors to begin and then to return as regular donors.

OFAAA members and friends and family can participate in the Lifelink program by donating anywhere in BC. Appointments are recommended. For clinic locations, hours, and to book your appointment, please call: 1 888 2 DONATE (1-888-236-6283).

Comments are invited.