



Safeguarding Blood Transfusions: The Role Of Haemovigilance In Minimizing Risks And Ensuring Patient Safety

¹LAMIYA NASRIN. K, ² SHINU C, ³ SILBIYA JASMINE. P.T, ⁴THAHMINA SHAHNAS.V. K

¹M. PHARM SCHOLAR, ²PROFESSOR, ³M. PHARM SCHOLAR, ⁴M. PHARM SCHOLAR

¹Department of pharmacy practice,

¹Al Shifa college of pharmacy, Kizhattur, India

Abstract: Blood transfusions are essential in modern medicine but carry risks, including transfusion reactions ranging from mild to severe. This review underscores the importance of haemovigilance, a system that monitors and analyses adverse events throughout the transfusion process to improve safety and prevent complications. The active involvement from healthcare professionals is crucial for effective haemovigilance, which includes proper reporting, education, and quality assurance initiatives. The review discusses the evolution of haemovigilance, noting a shift from focusing solely on infectious diseases to including non-infectious reactions. Programs like India's Haemovigilance Program and the National Blood Donor Alert Program highlight significant advancements in monitoring and improving safety for both patients and donors. Challenges such as inconsistent definitions and underreporting persist, requiring collaborative efforts and standardized procedures. Pharmacists play a key role in haemovigilance through monitoring, education, participation in committees, and ensuring proper handling of blood products. Studies reviewed reveal a prevalence of febrile non-haemolytic reactions and underreporting issues, highlighting the need for robust haemovigilance systems. IT-based haemovigilance shows promise but needs careful implementation. Donor Hemovigilance Programmes (DHVPs) effectively enhance donation safety, especially in resource-limited settings. Education and training interventions for healthcare professionals significantly improve compliance with transfusion protocols and reduce errors, highlighting the importance of continuous education in enhancing haemovigilance practices. Overall, the review emphasizes that fostering a culture of awareness and reporting among healthcare professionals is vital for optimizing haemovigilance and ensuring safer blood transfusion practices.

Index Terms - Haemovigilance, Adverse transfusion reactions, Haemovigilance Program, National Blood Donor Alert Program, Febrile Non-Haemolytic Transfusion Reactions.

I. INTRODUCTION

Blood transfusions are a cornerstone of modern medicine, have played a critical role for decades in saving lives⁽¹⁾. Among hospital procedures, blood transfusions rank as one of the most frequently performed. Blood transfusions is critical for managing severe anaemia, significant blood loss from trauma or surgery, clotting disorders, and specific cancer treatments impacting bone marrow function⁽²⁾. Blood transfusion involves a multidisciplinary approach, requiring seamless collaboration between various healthcare professionals. This collaborative effort encompasses the blood bank's transfusion medicine team, nurses, physicians, and all other healthcare professionals involved in patient care⁽³⁾.

Despite their lifesaving benefits, blood transfusions can be associated with a range of potentially serious adverse events, collectively termed transfusion reactions⁽³⁾. These reactions encompass any untoward event experienced by a patient during or following blood product administration that cannot be attributed to another identifiable cause⁽⁴⁾. Complications are typically categorized based on factors such as origin, timing, cause,

and severity⁽⁴⁾. Studies have shown that febrile non-haemolytic reactions are the most common (40%), followed by mild allergic reactions (28%), hypersensitivity reactions (12%), and haemolytic reactions (4%)⁽⁵⁾.

Haemovigilance has emerged as a critical system to ensure the safety and efficacy of blood transfusions. This comprehensive monitoring program encompasses all stages of the transfusion process, from blood donation and component processing to delivery, administration to patients, and patient follow-up. Haemovigilance actively tracks, reports, investigates, and analyses adverse events associated with any stage of transfusion. Its ultimate goal is to prevent future occurrences of these negative events by developing and implementing effective preventive measures⁽⁶⁾.

Active participation of healthcare professionals in haemovigilance programs is crucial for guaranteeing safe blood transfusions and improving patient outcomes. Proper knowledge and execution of haemovigilance procedures by these professionals can significantly reduce the likelihood of transfusion-related complications⁽⁷⁾. Given their proximity to patients and understanding of transfusion reactions, healthcare professionals hold a significant responsibility in reporting adverse events.

This review has highlighted the critical role of haemovigilance in ensuring the safety and efficacy of blood transfusions. By comprehensively monitoring the entire transfusion process, haemovigilance programs can identify and address potential risks at every stage. Effective implementation requires active participation from all healthcare professionals involved in blood transfusion, from blood donation to patient follow-up. By fostering a culture of awareness and reporting of adverse events, healthcare professionals can significantly contribute to optimizing haemovigilance practices. Ultimately, these efforts will lead to a safer and more efficient blood transfusion system, benefiting both patients and the overall healthcare system.

The evolving concerns in haemovigilance

The discovery of ABO blood groups led to widespread blood transfusion, but concerns about transfusion-transmitted infections emerged in the late 20th century. France pioneered haemovigilance systems in the 1990s, and a global network is working towards standardized practices. However, challenges remain in some Asian countries⁽⁸⁾.

Adverse reactions can stem from incidents throughout the transfusion process, such as errors, deviations from protocols, and failures, posing risks to both donors and recipients. The UK's Serious Hazards of Transfusion (SHOT) program suggests human error is the leading cause of serious transfusion complications, with ABO incompatible blood transfusions being the most severe, often leading to significant morbidity or even fatalities⁽⁹⁾.

Initially, haemovigilance systems focused on infectious diseases transmitted through transfusion but later broadened to include both infectious and non-infectious adverse reactions as HIV, HBV, and HCV transmission rates declined significantly⁽⁹⁾.

Expanding haemovigilance beyond blood and its components is crucial for enhancing transfusion safety. This entails monitoring the effectiveness and efficiency of the entire transfusion process, ensuring not only blood product safety but also optimizing blood resource utilization. By overseeing appropriate blood use, therapeutic outcomes, avoiding under- or overtreatment, and minimizing wastage, haemovigilance contributes to overall transfusion safety⁽⁹⁾.

Blood safe India: the national haemovigilance initiative

Collaborating with the National Institute of Biologicals in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, India initiated The Haemovigilance Program of India on December 10, 2012. This system focuses on systematically tracking and recording adverse reactions after blood transfusions. **The program enables the collection of reports on serious side effects after receiving blood products.** This improves the patient safety and care by recommending and implementing best practices and policies in blood transfusions and blood product administrations⁽⁸⁾.

Objectives of reporting

- Track and document adverse events following blood transfusions.
- Enhance Healthcare Professional Awareness
- Recommend the CDSCO to establish standardized practice for blood products.
- Communication with key stakeholders
- Promote Patient Safety Policy

Utilize collected data to identify areas for improvement and implement system changes to minimize future patient complications⁽⁴⁾

Blood donation safety: the national blood donor alert program (NBDVP)

Haemovigilance systems recently shifted focus towards donor safety, recognizing its crucial role in the transfusion chain's quality cycle. Although its overall safety, blood donation carries potential risks due to various identified factors that may lead to complications. The National Blood Donor Alert Program came into effect on June 14th, 2015. The Program, focused on the process of blood collection (donor blood movement), strives to improve safety and quality for both blood donors and recipients throughout India. By systematically monitoring donor related adverse events, the NBDVP enables data collection and promotes further investigation, ultimately leading to better safety measures for blood donors.

Overcoming obstacles in haemovigilance: strengthening blood donation safety

The current state of haemovigilance and Materiovigilance reveals persistent challenges due to inconsistent definitions, terminology, and reporting standards, leading to significant underreporting of adverse reactions linked to blood transfusions. Key problems in haemovigilance include fragmented blood transfusion systems, government apathy, clinician ignorance, fear-driven underreporting, delayed reporting, inconsistent reporting channels, incomplete incident documentation, and communication barriers between healthcare facilities and blood banks. To overcome these challenges, collaborative initiatives involving regulatory bodies such as CDSCO and donor haemovigilance programs are vital to encourage active participation from blood centres and ensure comprehensive data gathering for evidence-based safety protocols in blood donation. Addressing these challenges requires improved awareness strengthened regulatory frameworks, standardized reporting procedures, trained staff, and improved cooperation among stakeholders⁽⁸⁾.

Categorizing transfusion reactions: an ISBT-based approach

The International Society of Blood Transfusion (ISBT) and the Haemovigilance Programme of India categorize transfusion reactions based on their origin and onset.

1. **Based on the origin:** Reactions can be non-infectious, arising from properties within the blood product itself (e.g., febrile non-haemolytic reactions, hyperkalaemia), or infectious, caused by pathogens transmitted in the blood (e.g., bacterial sepsis, viral infections).
2. **Based on the onset:** Reactions can be **acute**, occurring during or shortly after transfusion (minutes to hours), or **delayed**, developing hours to days or even weeks later. Acute reactions can be further subdivided into **immune-mediated** (haemolytic transfusion reactions, allergic reactions, TRALI) and **non-immune** (hyperkalaemia, transfusion-associated circulatory overload). Delayed reactions encompass both **immune** (delayed haemolytic transfusion reactions, post-transfusion purpura, TA-GVHD, immunomodulation) and **non-immune** (hemosiderosis) types.
3. **Unclassifiable transfusion reactions:** In rare instances, even after thorough investigation, the cause of a transfusion reaction may remain unclassified.

This categorization system aids healthcare professionals in diagnosing and managing transfusion reactions effectively. By understanding the origin and timing of the reaction, they can take appropriate steps to minimize complications and ensure patient safety.

The essential involvement of pharmacists in haemovigilance

Pharmacists are key players in guaranteeing the safety and effectiveness of blood transfusions through haemovigilance programs. Pharmacists, with their knowledge on drugs and patient safety, engage in various activities by collaborating with healthcare teams aimed at monitoring, preventing, and managing adverse reactions associated with blood transfusions.

1. Monitoring Adverse Reactions:

Pharmacists monitor patients for adverse reactions during and after blood transfusions, collaborating with healthcare teams to promptly recognize and manage any transfusion-related adverse events. This includes recognizing symptoms of adverse reactions, conducting thorough assessments, and documenting accurately for investigation.

2. Educating Healthcare Professionals:

Pharmacists provide education and guidance to healthcare professionals, including nurses, physicians, and laboratory staff, on proper transfusion practices, covering indications, compatibility testing, and administration techniques. They also educate patients on the risks and benefits of blood transfusions, enabling

informed decision-making, and contribute to the development and implementation of transfusion protocols to ensure adherence to established guidelines for safe practices.

3. **Participating in Transfusion Committees:**

Pharmacists play an integral role in transfusion committees within healthcare settings, offering their expertise to develop policies and protocols for ensuring the safety of blood transfusions. Pharmacists provide valuable insights into medication management, adverse event reporting, and risk reduction strategies within these committees.

4. **Reporting and Investigating Incidents:**

Pharmacists are vital role in the reporting and investigation of transfusion-related incidents, collaborating with healthcare teams to identify causes and prevent recurrence. Pharmacists maintain accurate documentation of all transfusion activities, ensuring regulatory compliance and facilitating reporting to hemovigilance programs and regulatory bodies.

5. **Ensuring Proper Storage and Handling:**

Pharmacists supervise the proper storage and handling of blood products to maintain their integrity and safety, ensuring compliance with storage requirements and monitor inventory levels to prevent wastage or shortages.

6. **Quality Assurance and Improvement:**

Pharmacists participate actively in quality assurance and improvement initiatives related to hemovigilance. They assess transfusion-related processes, analyze data on adverse events and near misses, and implement changes to enhance patient safety and improve transfusion outcomes

7. **Research and Development:**

Pharmacists contribute to research initiatives aimed at advancing transfusion medicine and improving transfusion safety. They participate in clinical trials, haemovigilance studies, or quality improvement projects aimed at optimizing blood product utilization and reducing transfusion-related risks.

In brief, pharmacists are integral to haemovigilance, undertaking a range of responsibilities to guarantee the secure and optimal utilization of blood products, with the overarching goal of improving patient outcomes.

Results and Discussion

Blood transfusions are life-saving medical procedures, but like any medical intervention, they carry some risk. Transfusion reactions, adverse events occurring during or after a transfusion, can range from mild discomfort to life-threatening complications. Understanding these reactions is crucial for ensuring patient safety and improving transfusion practices.

The studies by Aneke et al. and Grandi et al. offer valuable insights into the realm of transfusion reactions. Both reported a prevalence of febrile non-haemolytic reactions, with Aneke et al. even documenting one fatality. However, a more troubling aspect lies in the shortcomings of hemovigilance practices. In Aneke et al.'s study, a mere 37.5% of reactions were investigated, and none were reported to the hospital's blood transfusion committee⁽²⁾. Similarly, Grandi et al. analysed existing reports but lacked details on overall reporting rates. This suggests significant under-reporting of transfusion reactions across institutions⁽¹⁾. While the lack of association between patient characteristics and reaction types (reported in Aneke et al.) is somewhat reassuring, the dearth of investigated reactions limits our understanding of potential risk factors and prevents effective preventive measures. These studies highlight the urgent need for robust hemovigilance programs. Standardized reporting procedures, thorough investigation of all reactions, and improved education for healthcare professionals are crucial to ensure patient safety during blood transfusions.

The study by Fujihara et al. delves into the intriguing world of information technology (IT)-based hemovigilance systems, exploring their impact on reporting and detection of transfusion reactions. Their findings illuminate both the potential benefits and drawbacks of these systems. The IT system led to a 10-fold increase in reported transfusion reactions, suggesting improved detection. Additionally, specific reactions like fever and tachycardia were reported more frequently. However, the study also identified a 0.52% rate of incorrect reports in the IT system, highlighting the need for user training and data validation measures. Overall, IT-based hemovigilance holds promise for improved patient safety, but careful implementation and data quality control are crucial⁽¹⁰⁾.

The studies by Vasudev et al. and Miah et al. shed light on the importance of hemovigilance programs in identifying and mitigating transfusion-related adverse reactions. Both studies, although conducted in different regions (India and Bangladesh), offer valuable insights for improving transfusion safety. Vasudev et al. provide a detailed breakdown of transfusion reaction risks associated with different blood components⁽¹¹⁾. Their findings highlight febrile non-haemolytic reactions (FNHTR) and allergic reactions as the most common

occurrences, with a higher risk observed for platelets compared to red blood cells (RBCs) or fresh frozen plasma (FFP). This data underscores the importance of considering product-specific risks during transfusion procedures. Both studies report a significant number of transfusion reactions. Vasudev et al. estimated a risk of 0.8 to 1.38 FNHTR per 1000 units transfused, while Miah et al. observed a 4.29% overall reaction rate⁽¹²⁾. This variation might be due to differences in study methodology or population demographics. These findings highlight the need for improved hemovigilance practices, including user-friendly reporting systems, standardized data collection, and regular healthcare worker education. Additionally, Vasudev et al. emphasize the value of a national hemovigilance program, which would enable comprehensive data collection and targeted interventions to optimize transfusion safety on a national scale.

The study by Mangwana et al. investigated the role of Donor Hemovigilance Programmes (DHVPs) in managing blood transfusions by examining complication rates in whole blood donors. They found a low overall complication rate (0.3%) with vasovagal reactions being the most common (82%). This study highlights some important points. Firstly, vasovagal reactions were the most frequent complication, and they were more likely to occur in younger donors, females, and first-time donors. This suggests that these groups would benefit from targeted pre-donation counselling and additional support during the donation process. Secondly, the majority of complications were mild syncopal reactions (18%), which further emphasizes the safety of whole blood donation. Most importantly, the low rate of serious complications (0.007%) underlines the effectiveness of DHVPs in monitoring and minimizing adverse events. The study also emphasizes the value of DHVPs in countries with limited resources. By analysing adverse events, DHVPs can identify at-risk donors and implement preventive measures like motivational strategies and improved donor care protocols. This can lead to a more sustainable blood supply without compromising donor safety⁽¹³⁾.

The two studies investigating knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding hemovigilance among doctors in tertiary care hospitals. Both studies, by Date et al. (India) and Samaranayaka (Sri Lanka), highlight a concerning lack of awareness and a low rate of transfusion reaction reporting. A significant portion of doctors in both studies displayed limited knowledge of hemovigilance programs (38.88% in India, unspecified in Sri Lanka) and transfusion reaction reporting centres (30% in India). This suggests a critical gap in understanding the importance of hemovigilance for maintaining a safe blood transfusion system. Only 22.22% of doctors in the Indian study reported transfusion reactions, mirroring the low notification rates observed in Sri Lanka. This indicates a significant underreporting of potential issues, hindering the identification and prevention of future complications⁽¹⁴⁾. Both studies pinpoint common reasons for underreporting such as complacency, time constraints, and cumbersome reporting procedures⁽¹⁵⁾.

The study by Prinja et al. investigates the effectiveness of education and intervention in improving nurses' knowledge and practices related to blood transfusions at a tertiary care hospital. The findings demonstrate a significant positive impact of the implemented program. Following the intervention, all nurses (100%) achieved a score between 24 and 30, indicating a substantial increase in knowledge and practice compared to the baseline assessment. The intervention resulted in 100% compliance in crucial areas like written transfusion orders and obtaining patient consent. This highlights the effectiveness of the program in promoting adherence to safety protocols. Errors related to blood request forms, sample labelling, and cross-checking of blood products by nurses significantly decreased after the intervention (from 8% to 0% for request errors and 4% to 0% for labelling errors). This suggests improved accuracy and reduced risk of complications. These findings highlight the effectiveness of education in promoting adherence to safety protocols, reducing errors, and potentially improving patient outcomes⁽¹⁶⁾.

Haemovigilance programs are vital safeguards for blood transfusions. They monitor, report, and investigate any adverse reactions associated with these procedures. Standardized reporting, thorough reaction investigations, and well-educated healthcare workers are all crucial for haemovigilance effectiveness. National programs offer a broader perspective, enabling comprehensive data collection and targeted interventions to optimize transfusion safety across healthcare systems. Donor vigilance programs further minimize risks for both blood donors and recipients.

However, studies highlight a concerning knowledge gap – a lack of awareness among some doctors regarding haemovigilance. Targeted educational programs are needed to address this. Conversely, educational interventions have proven highly effective in improving nurses' knowledge and adherence to safety protocols.

In conclusion, robust haemovigilance programs with active participation from all healthcare professionals are essential for guaranteeing safe and effective blood transfusions. This collaborative approach, with informed doctors and empowered nurses and other health care workers are the key to optimizing transfusion safety.

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