

Research examines how blood drives motivate blood donation

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There is typically a shortage of donated blood in the United States, and research at Case Western Reserve University is looking for ways of improving the life-saving supply.

Nicola Lacetera, assistant professor of economics at the university's Weatherhead School of Management, notes that about 38 percent of Americans are eligible to donate [blood](#) and only about 8 percent do. Many of those who donate a first time don't donate again, and there are some population segments which very rarely give blood.

So an important question nationally is: What is the proper incentive so that the rate of blood donation can increase?

"There is a big demand and supply is not keeping up," Lacetera said. "There is a vast population of people who could donate but don't. There is an extensive campaign by the American Red Cross and other organizations about blood shortages. So people do know about it."

The biggest draw tends to be a sense to do something good for humanity after a crisis that gets national attention, such as after terrorist attacks in the United States on Sept. 11, 2001, or the recent earthquakes in Chile and Haiti. But the need for blood supplies is large whether or not a disaster occurs.

"There is a general perception that you need blood for emergencies or an [organ transplant](#). Most of the blood needed every day is for chronic conditions, such as for [cancer](#) patients. Therefore, blood is needed every day," Lacetera said.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, through the National Science Foundation, is funding the collaborative research effort. Throughout this year, Lacetera's team is planning extensive data analysis involving over 14,000 blood drives in northern Ohio to assess whether

the provision of incentives boosts donations.

"We are excited about the research being done by Case Western Reserve and feel the results will help our organization better understand how donors are motivated to give," said Brent Bertram, Red Cross director, donor recruitment, for the Northern Ohio region. "This knowledge will allow us to recruit donors more effectively and use our resources in the best way possible to meet the needs of local patients."

Lacetera said the collaboration with the [Red Cross](#) is beneficial for his research and the social service agency.

"They believe this study might benefit them in understanding how to increase blood supply in a region like Northern Ohio, where it's particularly relevant because there are so many big hospitals."

Gifts of T-shirts, lapel pins, coupons or gift cards indeed could be an attraction, but do those motivate blood donors to return to future blood drives? And there are some who say gifts shouldn't be involved at all, because people motivated to donate might not want to feel they are rewarded for giving.

Lacetera says that in some countries, in particular Italy, blood donors are given a day off work for their generosity. That benefit is unlikely in American blood drives, but data shows that small gifts for donation do increase turnout at sites. But a question is whether the people donating blood are simply switching from another site to another and would have donated anyway, referred to as a substitution effect.

Provided by Case Western Reserve University

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