

Southwest Regional Blood Consortium Request for Transfusion Guidelines Review

Executive Summary:

A collaboration of New Mexico transfusion medicine experts is preparing to circulate evidence-based guidelines for blood use. These will be distributed to New Mexico hospitals in order to help standardize transfusion medicine practice and to improve patient care.

Background:

Several years ago, a group of physicians and blood bank experts formed the New Mexico Blood Alliance; this grew out of the users group sponsored by United Blood Services of New Mexico. The intent was to collaborate on all aspects of transfusion medicine in New Mexico and the Four Corners region, such as evidenced-based practice, education, disaster preparedness, compliance, and patient safety. It has been recognized that, while lifesaving, blood used inappropriately may bring patient harm. Due to the rural nature of the Southwest, specific expertise in this area is sometimes lacking in hospitals. Over the past year, clinicians from the major hospital systems in Albuquerque have collaborated to come up with a set of evidence-based guidelines to assist hospitals and physicians in providing the best patient care.

In recognition of the broader applicability of these efforts, the group voted to change its name to the Southwest Regional Blood Consortium (Southwest RBC). Over the past year, we have met with the Lt. Governor on several occasions and with the Chief Medical Officer of the New Mexico State Department of Health. While the State is not in a position to endorse physician practice, they are supportive of this effort. Our plan was to make the New Mexico Medical Society aware of this effort and to allow NMMS to endorse it if allowed by their bylaws. We hope to resolve any concerns that may be raised. We will then work with the New Mexico Hospital Association to distribute these guidelines to hospitals.

Hospital medical executive committees are free to adopt these guidelines or not. Right now, much of the practice in the state is not in close alignment with national recommendations. Since the Joint Commission and other accrediting agencies are focusing more closely on these areas, and since blood is expensive, we anticipate that the hospitals will be very interested in increasing compliance and decreasing costs.

These guidelines are not intended to establish standard of care, but offer examples of evidence-based blood use in given situations, along with literature references. No two patients are identical, so physicians will still have to use clinical judgement in their transfusion practices. A clinician may feel that a certain patient needs transfusion outside of the guidelines, due to unique factors. If so, the clinician can just put a short comment about why a different treatment is indicated and this will meet the requirements for review by the accreditation bodies. In other words, physicians can transfuse how they feel is best for their patients; however, if their practices fall outside the guidelines, then the clinician will need to annotate the reason for divergence during the ordering or blood review process. This is what is being required by the accreditation bodies.

We are working on additional guidelines, such as indications for irradiation. We are preparing nursing educational materials at this time and have a number of transfusion medicine experts willing to make educational presentations across the state. We anticipate that the Southwest Regional Blood Consortium will continue to be an active resource for the physicians, patients, and hospitals of the region.

Respectfully,

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On behalf of the Southwest Regional Blood Consortium