

Blood Donor Information Pack

Why do we need donors?

We are all aware that blood donations are used to save lives on a daily basis in human hospitals. In the human world, blood products are used so regularly that donations can be taken pre-emptively at separate donation sites, stored and transported to hospitals where they will be used before their use-by date. The same cannot be said of veterinary medicine. We still need to use blood transfusions to save the lives of some patients but this does not occur on a daily basis.

In a large busy practice such as Garston Veterinary Group, we will probably perform a blood transfusion on average once per month. From 2007 it became legal to store animal blood products, however, special facilities are required to store blood safely and prevent break down of essential components. Unfortunately, the cost of these facilities for use only once per month would be prohibitive. There are large facilities from whom we can buy fresh blood, but they cannot guarantee delivery until midday the following day. For many of our patients this delay would be too long and their chances of survival would be slim.

For this reason we have a list of dog and cat owners who are prepared to allow their animal to donate blood at short notice for immediate transfusion in emergency cases. There are a number of criteria that these animals need to meet to ensure safety for themselves and the recipient patient. One of these criteria is age. Recently many of our blood donors have gone into retirement leaving us slightly short of donors. We cannot use donors with too much regularity or they will become anaemic, so we need to urgently boost our numbers. We are looking for about 15 dogs and 10 cats to join our donor list.

Criteria for donors

It is essential that donors fulfil the following criteria:-

- ✓ Cats must be over 4kg, dogs must be over 30kg
- ✓ Animals should be between 2 and 8 years old
- ✓ Have up to date routine vaccinations
- ✓ Animals should NEVER have travelled abroad, received a blood transfusion themselves or had a litter of puppies or kittens
- ✓ Be otherwise healthy and importantly, they should be calm and well behaved

If you would like your pet to become a donor please fill in your application form accurately and read the following information carefully which contains important information on what happens if you are asked to be on the donor list and what happens what a donation is required.

What is involved?

By their very nature blood transfusions are emergency procedures and for that reason they may be required at any time of the day or night. Under no circumstances do we expect anybody to change their lives when they join the donor list. We may never require your pet for a donation and will not expect you to be available all of the time. We simply ask that you are prepared to be contacted late at night or during the day and asked for help. If you are not available we have the opportunity to

contact one of the other 14 list members. There are three reasons that we need several donors, firstly, we try to get a few animals that live near to each practice so that the journey time is not too long, secondly, we expect a large proportion of donors may be unavailable and finally, even if we get a run of emergencies donors should not need to give blood more than once in a 6 month period (however, it is safe to give blood twice 6 weeks apart).

If you are available you will be asked to come to one of the three practices. You may be asked to leave your pet with us for an hour or so, or even over night if that is easier for you. Initially a blood sample will be taken to ensure that your pet has sufficient numbers of red blood cells to give a transfusion safely. If your pet is unflappable then we will not need to sedate them, however if your dog or cat gets worried or stressed then we will use some sedation, this is particularly common for cats. The reason for this is because the blood must be obtained from the jugular vein and it must be done cleanly so as not to damage the cells.

We use human collection bags for dogs and we must collect a minimum amount of blood for it to be safe which is why we need dogs to be over 30kg. We use a large syringe for cats with an anti-clotting agent already in the syringe. If your pet is sedated we will wait for it to be awake again before sending them home. There should be no ill-effects from donating blood but we advise you not to exercise them excessively for 24 hours afterwards.

Information for cat owners only:-

Cats have only two blood types, A and B. Cats naturally have antibodies to the other blood group present in their circulations. Giving a cat a transfusion from another blood group can be rapidly fatal and for this reason we may ask to blood type your cat. We will only need to do this once as their blood group will not change.

Ready to donate?

If you are prepared to go on the donor list please fill in the appropriate application form below and return it to one of the practices. If we feel that your animal fits the criteria we will put them on the list. Once we have more than fifteen animals on the list we will create a reserve list. It is likely that the younger animals on the reserve list will eventually make it onto the main donor list. We will let you know which list you are on and if this changes.

All applicants whether successful or not can be entered onto the blood transfusion mailing list. We will be producing an annual newsletter keeping you informed about donor and blood transfusion news in the practice. If you would like to receive this or our quarterly practice newsletter please tick the boxes on the application form.

All that remains is for us is to extend our sincere gratitude to all those who volunteer, with your help we hope to save more lives and return sick pets to their families.

Thank You!