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Sars over, she's ready to give blood again

By Lee Sze Yong

SHE cannot wait to give blood.

Before the Sars outbreak, nurse Coreen Low Kim Kuan, 42, used to visit Bloodbank@HSA every three months.

She said with a laugh: 'Blood donation has become such a habit that when it's time to go, I feel it.'



With the worst of Sars gone, the Health Science Authority (HSA) has updated its criteria for blood donors. Now, healthcare workers are allowed to donate blood if they have not been in contact with any Sars patient for the past three weeks.

Previously, anyone who had visited any in-patient hospital was asked to defer blood donation for three weeks as a precaution, even though it's not known if Sars can be spread through blood.

A nurse for more than 25 years, Ms Low understands the need to be careful.

She said: 'As blood donors, we want to help save lives, so the blood we donate should be at zero risk to others. This is social responsibility.'

Being a nurse helps her understand the importance of being a regular donor, but her greatest influence was her late father, who used to take her along on his donation trips when she was a little girl.

Ms Low said: 'My father used to tell me that this is one way we can give back to the community, so it kind of became part of me.'

Now, Ms Low takes her two sons along when she visits the blood bank. Husband Patrick Lim, 43, is also a regular donor.

To date, Ms Low has given blood 27 times, which means she will be getting a bronze award from the Singapore Red Cross Society later this year.

Female donors receive the bronze award after they donate 25 times, silver after 35 times and gold after 70 times.

Men are awarded the bronze, silver and gold medals for 25, 50 and 100 donations respectively.

Ms Cecilia Tan, director for Red Cross blood donor recruitment, hopes more Singaporeans will become regular donors like Ms Low.

She noted that now, only 1 per cent of Singaporeans are donors. 'If you can't come once every three months, you can come once a year,' she said.

'Hopefully, blood donation will become a habit with Singaporeans.'

To encourage them, the Red Cross is giving a beanie baby, courtesy of toy company TY, to every donor at Bloodbank@HSA from Aug 4 to 16, except on Aug 9.

Bloodbank@HSA is located at 11 Outram Road.

It is open 9am to 6pm on weekdays and 9am to 2pm on weekends.

For enquiries, call 6213-0626 or 6220-0183.

TIGHTER RULES, LESS BLOOD DONATED

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NEW diseases mean tighter regulations on blood donors.

And that, in turn, has meant less blood, as some donors have had to defer giving.

In the US, donors have to answer 50 questions about their health, travel and sexual history, up from 15 in pre-HIV days.

USA Today reported in June that blood banks may face shortages in the coming months due to these new restrictions.

In Singapore, due to the Sars outbreak, supplementary questions were added to a three-page long questionnaire which assesses blood donors' health.

A spokesman for the Health Science Authority said that Bloodbank@HSA constantly monitors issues that may affect blood safety, and updates the screening criteria when necessary.

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