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TOP STORIES



# A mum's plea for blood donations

By Rachel Cheng

HER daughter needs blood transfusions regularly, just to stay alive. Valerie Kum, 16, suffers from the blood disorder thalassaemia major (TM).

When she was 10, Valerie had to be hospitalised after her haemoglobin level dropped dangerously.

There had not been enough blood in the blood bank for her to get her transfusions during a festive season.

Her mother, Ms Aggie Tan, president of the Thalassaemia Society (Singapore), said: 'A normal person's haemoglobin level is about 15, but at that time, Val's was only 3.5.'

'She needed four bags of blood to bring her level to 10, which is normal for TM sufferers.'

Haemoglobin is the agent that carries oxygen and carbon dioxide in our bodies.

When we do not have enough blood in our bodies, our haemoglobin levels will drop.

TM patients with insufficient blood for a long period of time will look very pale. They will also have enlarged bone structure as their bone marrow works overtime to compensate for the lack of oxygen.

Ms Tan, 38, recalled the five days of anxiety. 'The doctors could not give her all the blood at one go. It would have given her a heart attack,' she said.

It was a harrowing time for the family, but 'in a way, Val's illness has made us stronger as a unit'.

Today, the Sec 4 student has to go for a transfusion every three weeks, each time requiring three bags of blood to keep her haemoglobin at a healthy level.

But, Ms Tan said there are still others who may not always get the blood they need.

It is for all such patients that the Singapore Red Cross and the Singapore Press Holdings hold the annual Red Challenge, to encourage people to donate blood.

The Red Challenge will be held during June, the 'drought' period for blood donations as schools close and families go for holidays overseas.

## THE TARGET AGE GROUP

The challenge aims to raise awareness about the need for blood donation and encourage youth organisations to actively recruit members to give blood.

Those between the ages of 16 and 25 are the target group for the Red Challenge.

Associate Professor Phua Kai Hong, vice-chairman of the Singapore Red Cross, said: 'Young people make up 11 per cent of the population but only half a per cent of them are blood donors.'

This year, the Red Challenge hopes to get at least 2,000 young people to donate blood.



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This would meet about 30 per cent of the daily needs of the hospitals in June.

Young members of the Red Cross Humanitarian Network (RCHN) from various tertiary institutions will be taking the lead this year.

The RCHN-Nanyang Technological University is holding a roadshow, 'Vibrant Blood', at Cathay Cineleisure Orchard from Jun 5 to 12, to raise awareness on blood donation. They have kickboxing and cheerleading performances as well as dance aerobics.

And there is a blood donation drive at the Meritus Mandarin hotel from today to Monday, 11am to 5pm daily.

The Hope Centre and Darul Gulfram Mosque are also participating.

The Red Challenge is to see which youth organisation gets the largest number of blood donors. The winner will be announced at the SPH News Centre on Jul 9.

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