

## **LETTER TO THE EDITOR**

Dear Editor

### **Re: Preventing anaemia in blood donors**

The authors<sup>1</sup> are to be congratulated for highlighting the risk of anaemia in blood donors, and their caution against the use of the copper sulphate screening method. While serum ferritin is a good method of evaluating iron status I think it is too prohibitive to be used as a routine procedure. There is a simpler method of prevention. It has been a policy in Johor state to “individualise” every regular and repeat donor. The haemoglobin level is estimated by the cyanmethaemoglobin method using a photoelectric colorimeter. (The oil palm estates on Johor have electricity). The donor is deferred if the haemoglobin level is below its first level recorded even though the current value is within the normal reference range.

By this simple policy of prevention, there is no need to evaluate iron status by more costly procedures, involving more logistics.

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### Reference

1. VS Nadarajah and G I Eow. Anaemia and iron status among blood donors in a blood transfusion unit in Malaysia. *Malays J Pathol* 2002; 24 (2): 99-102.

### **Reply from authors**

We thank the reader for highlighting his strategy to prevent development of iron deficiency among regular blood donors. Continued monitoring of donor parameters is encouraged though unfortunately not practiced widely. However, the use of declining haemoglobin levels as a deferral criteria may result in excessive numbers of regular blood donors being turned away despite being iron replete. The cyanmethaemoglobin method is cumbersome especially if used during large mobile blood donation campaigns and is also open to variations in reading and dependent on the operator. Deferral of regular blood donors may demotivate them and jeopardize blood supply.

In addition, donors may have latent iron deficiency despite normal haemoglobin levels as shown by 6 of 23 blood donors in our study who had low serum ferritin levels despite normal haemoglobin. We were however unable to determine if their haemoglobin levels had declined from their previous level as no serial haemoglobin readings for these subjects were available.