Platelet Transfusion Information

This is information about transfusions of platelets. Platelets are tiny cells made by the bone marrow and found in the blood. When a blood vessel is damaged platelets rush to the damaged area to help form a clot. This begins the healing process. When platelets get very low your blood may have trouble clotting. This may be from:

- Illness.
- Blood disorder.
- Chemotherapy to treat cancer.

Often lower platelet counts do not usually cause problems.

Platelets usually last for 7–10 days. If they are not used not used in an injury, they are broken down by the liver or spleen.

Symptoms of low platelet count include:

- Nosebleeds.
- Bleeding gums.
- Heavy periods.
- Bruising and tiny blood spots in the skin.
  - Pin point spots of bleeding are called (*petechiae*).
  - Larger bruises (*purpura*).
- Bleeding can be more serious if it happens in the brain or bowel.

Platelet transfusions are often used to keep the platelet count at an acceptable level. Serious bleeding due to low platelets is uncommon.

BEFORE THE PROCEDURE

- Your doctors will check your platelet count regularly.
- If the platelet count is too low it may be necessary to have a platelet transfusion.
- This is more important before certain procedures with a risk of bleeding such as a spinal tap.
- Platelet transfusion reduces the risk of bleeding during or after the procedure.
- Except in emergencies, giving a transfusion requires a written consent.

Before blood is taken from a donor, a complete history is taken to make sure the person has no history of previous diseases, nor engages in risky social behavior. Examples of this are intravenous drug use or sexual activity with multiple partners. This could lead to infected blood or blood products being used. This history is done even in spite of the extensive testing to make sure the blood is safe. **All blood products transfused are tested to make sure it is a match for the person getting the blood. It is also checked for infections. Blood is the safest it has ever been. The risk of getting an infection is very low.**

PROCEDURE

- The platelets are stored in small plastic bags which are kept at a low temperature.
- Each bag is called a unit and sometimes two units are given. They are given through an intravenous line by drip infusion over about one half hour.
- Usually blood is collected from multiple people to get enough to transfuse.
- Sometimes, the platelets are collected from a single person. This is done using a special machine that separates the platelets from the blood. The machine is called an apheresis machine. Platelets collected in this way are called apheresed platelets. Apheresed platelets reduce the risk of becoming sensitive to the platelets. This lowers the chances of having a transfusion reaction.
- As it only takes a short time to give the platelets, this treatment can be given in an outpatients department. Platelets can also be given before or after other treatments.

RISKS & COMPLICATIONS OF THE PROCEDURE

Severe side effects from platelet transfusions are uncommon. Minor reactions may include:

- Itching.
- Rashes.
- High temperature and shivering.

Medications are available to stop transfusion reactions. Let your caregivers know if you develop any of the above problems.

If you are having platelet transfusions frequently they may get less effective. This is called becoming refractory to platelets. It is uncommon. This can happen from non-immune causes and immune causes.
Non-immune causes include:

- High temperatures.
- Some medications.
- An enlarged spleen.

Immune causes happen when your body discovers the platelets are not your own and begin making antibodies against them. The antibodies kill the platelets quickly. Even with platelet transfusions you may still notice problems with bleeding or bruising. Let your caregivers know about this. Other things can be done to help if this happens.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

Any of the following symptoms over the next 12 hours or several days:

- Shaking chills.
- Fever with a temperature greater than 102º F (38.9º C) develops.
- Back pain or muscle pain.
- People around you feel you are not acting correctly, or you are confused.
- Blood in the urine or bowel movements or bleeding from any place in your body.
- Shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing.
- Dizziness.
- Fainting.
- You break out in a rash or develop hives.
- You have a decrease in the amount of urine you are putting out, or the urine turns a dark color or changes to pink, red, or brown.
- A severe headache or stiff neck.
- Bruising more easily.

Document Released: 10/14/2008 Document Re-Released: 09/26/2009
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