

New thinking is changing the assumptions about how blood is used in hospitals, and Palmetto Health is at the forefront of institutions taking a new look at this important medical practice.

# Trimming Our Need for Blood

by Mike Fitts

We think of a blood transfusion as one of the more ordinary medical procedures. In fact, the human body treats that transfusion as if it were an organ donation. The body's immune system is weakened in reaction to the unknown tissue. This can make the recipient more vulnerable to infections for up to one year afterward, and sometimes even longer.

This new view has caused a reassessment of when blood should be given to patients. A system-wide team is crafting new standards for when transfusing blood makes sense.


"It's not that the blood is impure or otherwise infectious in itself," said Anne Brittain, Performance Improvement Project Manager. "There's simply a physical price to be paid for receiving someone else's blood."

Palmetto Health is leading the way in looking at this issue. "It's totally different from what we were taught in medical school," said Dr. Shawn Stinson, Vice President of Clinical Quality and Patient Safety.

Now the Patient Blood Management team is evaluating what blood use makes sense. For some procedures such as a joint replacement surgery, the best practice is not automatically to transfuse blood, unless other factors require it, Stinson said. Even procedures such as open-heart surgery are seeing a sizable reduction in the amount of blood given to patients.

Some patients will be slightly anemic during recovery without a transfusion, but overall it makes more sense to simply let them recover, Brittain said.

As a secondary consideration, blood can be expensive.

While the team is working to reduce blood use, they know that there always will be times when a blood transfusion is necessary. With these new best practices, the bar for transfusion will be set higher, Brittain said. 

## DONATE BLOOD

Our patients still rely on donated blood, and the Red Cross is facing a dire shortfall. To make an appointment to give at a Palmetto Health location, go to [redcrossblood.org](http://redcrossblood.org).