

Blood bank needy

by Rob Johnstone

The new Red Cross Blood Donor building is only a five minute walk from the center of the University of Alberta campus. Yet students have perhaps been remiss in their duty, as healthy young Canadians, to give the gift which countless lives depend on.

Faye Ripley, of the Blood Donor Recruitment Office at the new facility, points out that, while U of A students do account for a large amount of donated blood, the percentage of students giving blood is disappointingly low. When one considers that the university population of about 30,000 persons is equal to that of a fair sized city, it follows that donorship could be much higher.

Until July of this year, donating blood has involved a much simpler process. Now, prospective donors must first complete a private interview with a nurse to determine if impurities have entered their blood system. Blood can be tainted by several things, among them acupuncture, ear-piercing, tattoos, and electrolysis. Hepatitis, the disease associated with blood impurities, requires a six month incubation period, during which blood donorship is strictly taboo.

Because of the new stricter measures for blood donors, and because the summer months are always a slow time for blood donorship, the present situation at the Red Cross building is not entirely a happy one. The Red Cross is definitely in need of donors. Jerry Phillipson, Director of Blood Donor Recruitment at the facility, is hopeful that students at the U of A will fulfill that need.

Giving blood is a satisfying experience, and once one overcomes the fear of the needle, the rest is quite simple.

Donation begins with registration as a blood donor. This is followed by the interview to establish a recent medical history, and then a finger prick to test the donor's blood. The finger prick yields information about a person's iron level and ABO (blood type) group. It also tests for syphilis, hepatitis, and AIDS, and is the final step before the actual donation.

Conditions at the facility are much more accommodating than at the portable clinics. The blood donor is led to a recliner-type easy chair, and may relax while the actual donation is taking place. After the donor's intravenous has filled a 450ml plastic pack, he can walk over to the snack bar, which stocks a variety of free cookies, pop and treats, aimed at restoring energy and making the donors feel like they get something in return for their

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donation.

Once the donor steps out of the picture, the real work begins on the blood. The donation begins as whole blood, and is broken down into plasma, platelets, and white and red blood cells. All these components serve different functions in treating patients, and one blood donation has



Photo: Rob Johnstone

the potential of providing needed blood parts to several people.

After the blood has been separated and packaged, it comes into the hands of the fleet delivery team. Their job is to get the blood out to the hospitals wherever it is needed and as quickly as possible. Time is an important element in the whole process, as blood, much like beer, has a limited shelf life, and must be used before its expiry date. Whole blood has a shelf life of 35 days, and the expiry time for platelets is only three to five days. This means hospitals are constantly in need of these vital components, and are always looking to the Red Cross.

Apart from the thanks of the staff at the centre, there are other good reasons for giving blood. New blood is richer and healthier than old blood, and our bodies can produce the new blood quickly. Frequent donors give blood up to four times a year, and many claim to be healthier because of it. Another bonus is the blood donor card, which automatically links your name with your blood type for quick identification in times of emergency.

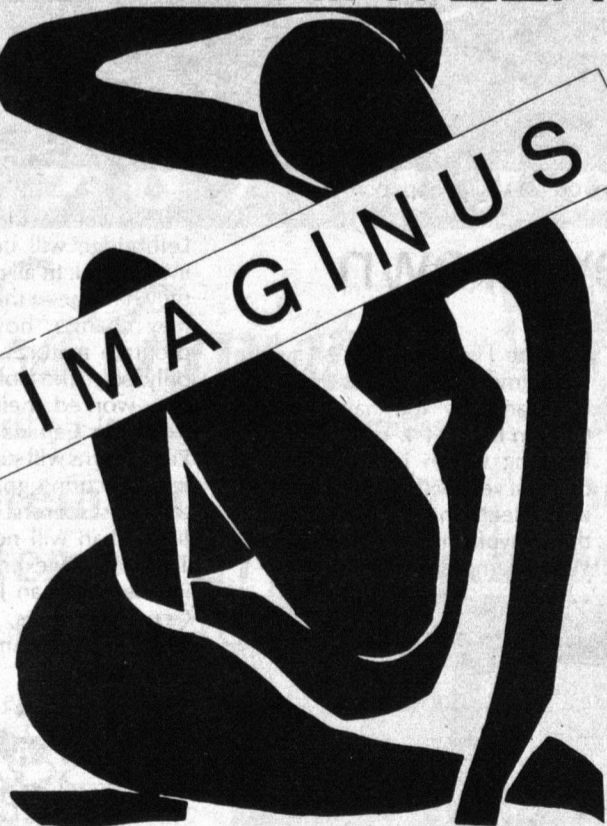
Ripley also stressed the sanitary

conditions involved in the process. Needles are used only once and then discarded, so there is no possible way of contracting someone else's disease as a donor.

Past donors are encouraged to visit the new facility, and see for themselves the changes in blood donorship. One exciting new procedure is called Apherisis, a process in which only some parts of the blood are removed, and the remaining blood returned to the donor's system. For example, we can now collect plasma only, and since plasma regenerates much more quickly than whole blood, it is possible to donate as often as 52 times in six months.

For those interested in donation, there will be a blood donor clinic set up in CAB from October 5 - 9. It only takes 30 minutes, and you will be providing a service to hospitals and patients throughout Northern Alberta. If you cannot attend during the blood drive week, remember that there is a permanent facility at 8249 - 114 Street, where you can enjoy a greater degree of comfort and indulge in a better selection of cookies.

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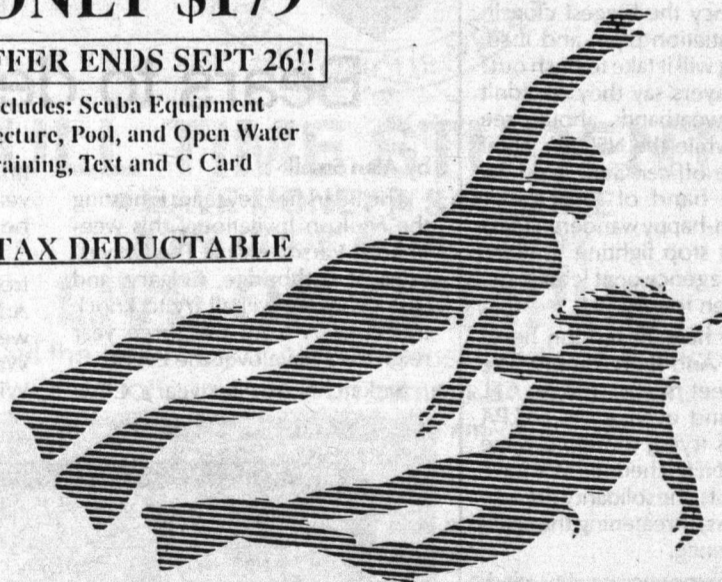
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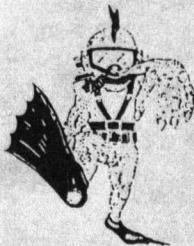
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