

World Blood Donor Day and Organized Blood Donation Movement in the USA

The World Health Organization (WHO) recently celebrated 20th World Blood Donor Day with the theme, “Celebrating 20 years of giving, thank you, blood donors!”. It is known that the first blood transfusion was done in 1795 by Philip Syng Physick, an American physician in Philadelphia. It seems that the WHO started an organized effort to create awareness in blood donation after 200 years of first blood transfusion. From this one can understand that creation of awareness for blood donation needs organized and persistent efforts, as well as appreciation of donors.

The Nepalese American diaspora started an organized blood donation movement about fifteen years ago, on June 2009, just five years after the WHO. The pace of this movement could not grow well until 2014 and blood donation activities were limited in and around New York. Once the first historical convention of the Nepalese American blood donors was held in Dallas, TX from May 27-29, 2016 with the convention theme “assimilation with society through blood donation” the organized blood donation movement leaped wide leaving a permanent footprint.

On March 1st, 2018, John Woolslair Sheppard (Johnny), a Juris Doctor, a writer, an icon of whole blood donation, the inhabitant of Fort Myers, Florida, joined Blood Donors of America (BDA) with his blood donor spouse, Ellen Sheppard in the capacity of BDA life member. Later, Johnny was honored with honorary membership category of the BDA for his exceptional contribution to the community by blood donation. Johnny was also a recipient of the award from the Guinness World Records for his 311 pints of whole blood donation in May 2011. He continued his donation until the age of 87 hitting the highest number of donations, 388 pints of whole blood until the end of his life, Feb 2022. Johnny was a patron, a great mentor, a friend of Nepalese Americans blood donors, and a volunteer in true sense who educated the next generation of blood donors through his countless lifelong experienced speech.



Nanda Regmi, DVM, PhD

He stood alongside BDA throughout once he joined at the age of 84. BDA has created a documentary in honor of Johnny and has uploaded it to the official website of BDA, blooddonorsofamerica.org. Johnny was the inaugural guest of BDA 2nd national convention held in Atlanta, GA in May 2018. He also introduced BDA to the American communities through an article in News Press on June 8, 2018 with a title “blood donation experience memorable for me”.

While constructing a wider and paved pathway of joint blood donation movement in the USA, BDA has been favored by several organizations from the local to national level. The Embassy of Nepal for the USA has continuously participated in all four national conventions of BDA since 2016 to witness the activities of BDA and endorse it. This participation has been regarded as a strong solidarity of the embassy with BDA in serving the communities through blood donation.

Likewise, BDA started a synchronized blood donation program once in a year from 2017 to boost blood donation movement across the states. Similarly, BDA launched several mega blood drive events where up to 135 pints of blood donation has been registered at the max at a single spot in a day. In addition, BDA has organized blood donation events in partnership with City of Euless, Texas, a government entity, to motivate people to serve the community through blood donation. Thus, BDA has extended its organizational relationship with several organizations within the USA, internationally with International Federation of Blood Donors Organizations, and in Nepal with Blood Donors Association, Nepal.

On the background of these various efforts made over the last several years, BDA has been able to contribute more than 12K pints of blood across the USA. Based on the population size of Nepalese Americans assumed to be present in the USA as of today, the contribution made by this community accounts about 0.7% of national demand. To make the blood donation movement wider and much stronger, BDA recently modified its organizational structure and has established its several state level committees to unite blood volunteers across the USA. A blood volunteer can join BDA as a life member, general member, good will member, or an advisor etc. BDA has been a 15-year-old organization with the glorious history of four national conventions up to now, such as the 3rd convention in Colorado in 2021, and fourth convention in Baltimore, in July 2023.

There are two clearly stated missions of BDA, first is to create awareness in blood donation and unite the blood volunteers to create a united strength that may introduce Nepalese diaspora and Nepal with due regards in the USA. The second is to educate ordinary people in the part of health, a potential benefit possible to gain by being a regular blood donor. For example, a blood donor gets the benefits of blood pressure and iron examined at the time of screening, and cholesterol quantified after blood donation. Similarly, there are several other diseases to be tested in the blood of donor before transfusion. One does not need to pay for these services and health insurance is not required.

BDA organized countless health talk programs, and even on-site blood donation events following the guidelines of government entities during COVID 19 pandemics. The mental health related professional talks, awareness on available preventive measures during the time of COVID 19 outbreak, and information of qualitative tests for COVID 19 infection for blood donors etc. were extremely important services that BDA offered at the time of COVID 19 outbreak.

As we can see from the theme of WHO for this year 2024, the blood volunteers are required to be appreciated. Appreciation of blood volunteer has already been started by BDA. BDA lost her central executive member, Mrs. Ira Acharya, while she was holding the office for a tenure of 2019-2021.

BDA established a trust fund 3 years ago to make her volunteering services immortal. The name of the trust fund, “BDA-IRA memorial trust fund”, owns rupees 7 lakh, and has been established in Janaki Secondary School Meghauli, Chitwan, Nepal. The fund awards the best three students, including a girl, based on their academic merits and financial situations. In addition, the school organizes a blood donation event at least once a year on June 14, the BDA day and world blood donor day.

Lastly, I would like to wish the grand success of the ANA convention. I would also appreciate and thank all blood donors on world blood donor day, June 14, 2024.

Dr. Nanda L. Regmi is a Senior Scientist in the department of Pediatrics at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, TX, USA. His work is in gene therapy translational research to treat monogenic causes of neurological diseases, especially in young kids.

Dear ANA family Sending warm wishes to all ANA Annual Convention attendees.

May our gathering be a catalyst for positive change, filled with insightful discussions, impactful networking, and fruitful initiatives that empower us to create a better tomorrow.



Doba Dhakal
Advisor, ANA