

NBF Leadership Forum Focuses on Innovating for the Future

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Due to the current global economic crisis, organizations — including those in the transfusion medicine and cellular therapy communities — are assessing how their operations today and in the years to come may be affected. “We must evaluate our future by assessing how we are going to invest and what our priorities and impediments are,” said Tony Zezzo, National Blood Foundation chair and vice president of the Americas region for Ortho-Clinical Diagnostics, as he welcomed leaders in the field to the seventh annual NBF Leadership Forum, held April 20-21 in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla. He encouraged attendees to become engaged and discuss critical issues facing staff and overall organizational structure that may shape the industry’s outlook.

To jump-start the discussion, Robert Honigberg, MD, chief medical officer global medical affairs and clinical strategy at GE Healthcare, reviewed General Electric’s perspective on how health care in today’s environment will evolve to meet tomorrow’s needs and the importance of investing in innovation in a rapidly changing environment. “First we need to imagine a paradigm shift from what we do today with a patient being treated only after becoming symptomatic to an early health model where new technologies are used to figure out who is predisposed



At the NBF Leadership Forum, leaders in the transfusion and cellular therapy communities discussed the current obstacles and future opportunities in the field.



or at higher risk to predict, prevent and diagnose earlier,” he said. This change will be driven by “precision medicine,” or focusing on minimizing costly and unnecessary treatments because, he explained, “70 percent of the health care dollar is spent on treatment. If we are more efficient and spend more on upfront technology, then we can realize savings.” These new technologies will be driven by the community’s commitment to innovation, but to succeed, the right customer must be identified.

Transitioning from the future of global health care, a “state of the industry panel” evaluated how blood centers and manufacturers are assessing the current challenges while focus-



ing on tomorrow’s opportunities. To accomplish this, Jim Covert, president and CEO of the Pittsburgh-based Institute for Transfusion Medicine, or ITxM, explained that his organization needed “strategic direction and sustained strategic investments.” As leaders, he stated, “We have the responsibility of providing quality products that are safe, and there must be continued investment in an organization to achieve this.” Under Covert’s direction, ITxM created a strategic plan that could be accomplished within five years. While developing the plan, ITxM also set five goals



work force, a decline in the number of people entering the field, hospitals' price shopping, delays in technology implementation, and blood center and manufacturer downsizing — but Don Doddridge, president and CEO of Florida Blood Services, told attendees that the community must “change the paradigm of how we look at things and get out of the box.” To do this, he encouraged each group to take different steps. Blood centers should examine potential partnerships, mergers and outsourcing;

implement lean strategies, which are technical tools and strategies that help streamline operations, eliminate waste and deliver excep-

— growth, quality, people, six sigma and research — to maintain focus

and remain an effective, quality-minded and customer-centric organization, but faced the challenge of bringing the staff on board with a plan focused on growth and strategic investment. “Using our knowledge and experiences with six-sigma technologies, we tied together the plan and cemented it with the people in our organization by assigning each project a staff champion.” One year into the plan, 46 projects are under way that are expected to save the organization millions of dollars.

There are many challenges facing blood centers today — including an aging

tional customer value; focus on productivity indicators; match strengths with opportunities — such as cellular therapies and cord blood — and be willing to take risks; and diversify income. Doddridge highlighted areas where transfusion services could improve, including centralizing compatibility testing, developing blood utilization programs and transfusion guidelines, and improving communications within the hospital and with blood centers. In addition, the community-at-large was pushed to develop the “professionals within” through job enrichment programs and innovative training. “We control our destiny, and we can do it by working together,” he concluded.

The manufacturers' perspective was

given by Brad Nutter, chairman of the board of directors at Haemonetics, and Ron Labrum, president and CEO of Fenwal. Both acknowledged that the biggest issue today is the economy, and manufacturers are feeling a big hit because, as blood centers cut costs, implementing new technologies is one of the first areas to go. Nutter stated that even in these uncertain times, Haemonetics is developing new products, including whole blood collection and processing, blood typing using chip technology and information technology applications. According to Labrum, “Our industry is one where it is important for us to maintain our investment philosophy and continue with R&D.” But this may be difficult for many because there is concern regarding how quickly new technologies will be adopted, and venture capital funding is more difficult to secure. “In the meantime,” Labrum said, “I think lots of idea sharing can and should go on, and the debate should be interesting as we move forward.”

Vic Schmitt, MBA, a venture partner at Bay City Capital in San Francisco, informed attendees that venture capital funding will open up again with the economic revival, and when it does, the transfusion medicine community should be ready to compete for recognition against all other health care sectors. “Because the transfusion medicine community is relatively small, there is a concern that there are not enough companies supporting the industry and not enough customers to get an investment return,” Schmitt said. In addition, the industry often is slow to embrace innovation and has not spent much time learning how to sell the value of its products and services. To overcome

these barriers, he encouraged the community to work together. “To be successful and develop partnerships with venture capitalists, the transfusion medicine community must make sure it is on the same side of the table defining what innovation the industry wants, what will drive the adoption of new technologies, and how there may be international opportunities with a product in order to stimulate the interest of the venture capital market and make an investment more attractive.”

On the second day of the forum, Marc Pearce, MBA, chief marketing officer at AABB, highlighted NBF’s role in furthering transfusion medicine and cellular therapy research. This year, the NBF saw a jump in the number of applications for grants — 43 received, up from 25 in 2008 — which he attributed to the increase in the monetary value of the grant. The NBF selected seven award recipients for 2009, five of which are dedicated to cellular therapy research. There also was an increase in the number of international applications, with proposals submitted by individuals from Argentina, Brazil, Canada and Israel. “Even in these difficult economic times, it is important for the NBF to continue its support of early-career researchers, who will become the next generation of leaders,” Pearce said.

After hearing the challenges faced by the transfusion medicine and cellular therapy communities, Jim AuBuchon, MD, president and CEO of Puget Sound Blood Center, encouraged everyone to “imagine the future.” He outlined four areas that could transform the industry in the next five to 10 years — innovating and investing in new technologies, implementing lean principles, using genomics,

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and focusing on patient safety through biovigilance. With a central theme of reducing waste, lean principles can help blood centers and transfusion services become more efficient and add value to their products and services. AuBuchon explained that by incorporating lean principles with the use of innovative and new technologies, such as RFID to continuously monitor supply levels at blood banks and within hospitals, the community could simplify processes, focus on steps that add value, and increase throughput and customization while decreasing time, costs and errors.

There is a national push for personalized medicine, which the community can embrace by implementing and using genomics to develop personalized transfusion therapy. Connie Westhoff, PhD, MT(ASCP)SBB, scientific director of the molecular blood group and platelet antigen testing for the American Red Cross, highlighted the development of DNA-based testing technologies for blood group genotyping. “This is the first new technology for blood typing since the discovery of ABO single assay for all clinically significant antigens,” she said. There are numerous advantages — low labor and reagent costs, high throughput testing, capability to be automated, and, most importantly, improved patient outcomes because of the ability to provide genotypically matched units — but work force issues remain a barrier to more widespread implementation.

To conclude, AuBuchon underscored the opportunity the community has to learn from the information it collects to better serve patients through participation in a national biovigilance network, which, he explained, “involves more than just data collection but also data analyses.” These analyses can be conducted at a national level but also locally through benchmarking organizational data with aggregate data from other facilities that are similar in size and location to identify and recommend best practices. Recognizing that these future possibilities still remain uncertain, AuBuchon noted, “There are many new innovations ahead of us, and we must remember the donors and patients because that is who we are trying to serve.”

The annual NBF Leadership Forum is an opportunity for corporate executives, blood center CEOs and other industry leaders to share information, build partnerships, and discuss the major issues affecting the future value, growth and strategic direction of transfusion medicine and cellular therapies. This private event is offered to members of the NBF Council on Research and Development, or CORD, and the Partners Program, which raises funds to help support the mission of the NBF. The NBF Leadership Forum is held every April.

For more information regarding the NBF Leadership Forum, CORD or the Partners Program, contact NBF at +1.301.215.6552 or nbf@aabb.org. 