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The Advancement of **Military Transfusion Medicine**



Association for the Advancement
of Blood & Biotherapies

Emerging Infectious Diseases Special Issue of *TRANSFUSION*

AABB is pleased to announce The Emerging Infectious Diseases special issue of *TRANSFUSION* is now available to AABB members. This issue was prepared by the AABB Transfusion Transmitted Diseases Committee and comprises 72 fact sheets with the latest critical information on infectious diseases for the field — the first comprehensive update since 2009.

This special edition includes 5 sections covering:

- prions
- bacteria
- protozoa/nematodes
- viruses
- other bacteria

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A Closer Look at Walking Blood Banks

Military leaders discuss a growing movement among some blood bankers and transfusion specialists to adapt the military's concept of walking blood banks to advance blood availability in civilian settings as well.

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The Evolution of Whole Blood Transfusions

Recent research indicates a renewed interest in using whole blood transfusions, an established military practice, to treat patients in civilian trauma settings.



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“Never Quit. Never Give Up.”

Army veteran and quadruple amputee shares how blood donations saved his life after recovering from injuries caused by an explosion.



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Commitment to Serve

It's not an exaggeration to say that the field of transfusion medicine would not be where it is today without the contributions of military medicine. For more than a century, innovations and medical advancements originating among military health care providers throughout the world have not only changed the outlook for those injured on the battlefield, they have also helped to spur improvements in civilian health care. Many military-inspired interventions have led to transformations in the way we provide care for a variety of patients in need of blood transfusions in the civilian sector. They have helped to provide life-saving support and advance patient care.

Advancing Blood Availability

This issue of *AABB News* focuses on transfusion medicine in the military. As you'll see, the military's advancements and influence in transfusion medicine practices are not merely something from the past. They have evolved throughout the past century, keeping patient care at the forefront, and continue to influence civilian care globally today.

The first feature story in this issue discusses the benefits of walking blood banks and their potential to advance blood availability for both military and civilian settings. In our second feature, military leaders explore the evolution of whole blood transfusions and discuss the benefits of using whole blood in both civilian trauma care and military medicine.

In addition, we are excited to highlight two Army veterans in this issue: 2023 ASBP Lifetime Achievement



Aaron A.R. Tobian, MD, PhD

Award recipient U.S. Army Col. Richard Gonzales, and U.S. Army Staff Sergeant and quadruple amputee Travis Mills. We hope their stories and lessons learned will inspire you and remind you of the transformative work you do every day.

Thank You

On behalf of AABB, I want to personally thank all active service members and veterans in our military blood banking community for their dedication, bravery, unwavering commitment and sacrifices. Your service is greatly appreciated. ■

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aaron Tobian".

Aaron A. R. Tobian, MD, PhD
AABB President

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Donor Spotlight: AABB's Senior Director of Accreditation and Quality Pays it Forward

By Amber Janney Zevallos, MNM
AABB Foundation Manager



Melanie Sloan, MS, MLS(ASCP)SBB, CQA(ASQ) (right) receiving an award during her military service.

The AABB Foundation serves the field of blood and biotherapies through grant making, educational offerings, and industry leadership engagement and recognition. Contributions from the community and recurring donors help to provide critical funding for the blood and biotherapies field and enable the AABB Foundation to continue its support for research and education initiatives. Our donors' support and generosity pay it forward, creating opportunities for the next generation of researchers in the field.

In this issue, we are excited to highlight Melanie Sloan, Lieutenant Colonel (USA, Retired), MS, MLS(ASCP)SBB, CQA(ASQ), AABB's senior director of accreditation and quality, and an AABB Foundation donor. Prior to joining the AABB team, Sloan served as an AABB lead quality assessor and held many positions with the U.S. Army, including health analyst in support of U.S. Army Africa Northrup Grumman, military blood bank officer and clinical laboratory officer. She recently spoke with *AABB News* about her career in military transfusion medicine and why she supports the AABB Foundation.

AABB NEWS: WHAT IS YOUR TITLE AT AABB, AND WHAT DOES YOUR JOB ROLE ENTAIL?

SLOAN: I am the senior director of accreditation and quality at AABB. I help professionals working in blood banking, transfusion medicine and biotherapies throughout the world develop systems, processes and procedures to standardize practices and reduce variation. I have a great sense of gratification in this current role; knowing that I might be able to assist people with the same kinds of challenges and issues I have faced in this field.

AABB NEWS: HOW DID YOU BECOME INTERESTED IN THE BLOOD FIELD AND, MORE SPECIFICALLY, MILITARY TRANSFUSION MEDICINE? CAN YOU WALK US THROUGH YOUR EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH THE U.S. ARMY FROM YOUR FIRST ROLE TO YOUR CURRENT ROLE?

SLOAN: I did Army ROTC in college, and then I did a one-year clinical laboratory internship in Greensboro, N.C. After that, I joined the Army, and my first job was a clinical laboratory scientist in Landstuhl, Germany. I noticed the closeness of the military blood banking community, and I wanted to be a part of it.

I learned a lot about the Army and the laboratory field as a clinical laboratory scientist, including how to work with people from all over the world, in a foreign country! How cool! I applied and was accepted into the Armed Services Blood Program (ASBP) Specialist in Blood Banking (SBB) school, which offers a master's degree and the opportunity to challenge the SBB exam.

My first job after that school was at the Fort Bragg Blood Donor Center in North Carolina. There, I was able to apply all my technical knowledge and work with military personnel to provide the right blood product at the right place at the right time.

On September 11, 2001, I remember being in the

donor center and watching that day unfold. As the day went on, more and more people came in to donate blood. We had a small staff, and we made it work. I made lifelong friends with my teammates and coworkers that day. The planes were all grounded, and our infectious disease testing laboratory at the time was in Fort Knox, Ky. We called around and got the laboratory at Virginia Blood Services in Richmond, Va., to test the donated blood samples for us. We had to use a bus service to transport the samples, but we got it done.

From there, I have had jobs dealing with blood collection and distribution throughout the world. My last job as an Army blood banker was also at the Fort Bragg Blood Donor Center, so I feel this location is the alpha and omega of my military career.

AABB NEWS: YOU HAVE SERVED IN THE U.S. ARMY SINCE 1992. HOW HAVE YOU SEEN TRANSFUSION MEDICINE IN THE MILITARY CHANGE THROUGHOUT THE PAST THREE DECADES?

SLOAN: I have seen the shift away from component therapy to the use of whole blood and even screening individual soldiers for walking blood banks. I have worked with rapid ABO kits to assist in the identification of which donors would donate which product with different anticoagulants and shelf lives. I have seen a lot more automation: from the use of blood establishment computer systems to automated scales and donor screening tools.

AABB NEWS: HOW DOES YOUR MILITARY EXPERIENCE HELP YOU IN YOUR AABB ROLE?

SLOAN: I have tenacity, endurance and an optimistic approach to challenges. Additionally, teamwork is vital to the success of any organization. Teamwork helps to build redundancies into processes and ensures that the work is shared across many shoulders. Organizational processes are better vetted and received when team member stakeholders are involved in process review and retool. My military experience showed me the true value of teamwork.

AABB NEWS: WHAT INSPIRES YOU TO GENEROUSLY SUPPORT THE WORK OF THE AABB FOUNDATION BY MAKING A PHILANTHROPIC DONATION EACH YEAR?

SLOAN: The blood banking community has been so good to me, and I want to pay it forward. It's an



Sloan says her military experience showed her the "true value of teamwork."

honor to give back to this community.

AABB NEWS: FUELING INNOVATIVE RESEARCH IS A CRITICAL PART OF THE AABB FOUNDATION MISSION. HOW DO YOU SEE INNOVATIVE RESEARCH MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR WORK AND ACROSS THE FIELD?

SLOAN: There is a famous quote that says, "If we do the same things all the time, we can expect the same results." The blood community will constantly work to meet the differing needs of differing patient sectors and populations with novel and innovative blood products. Cold-stored platelets fill a patient's need, as do freeze-dried plasma and whole blood. It is in our best interest as a community to use our scientific knowledge of blood banking to develop solutions to disease and morbidity. Research provides our blood banking and cellular therapy customers with an arsenal of products with which to combat disease and morbidity. ■

Make your donation today to help support early career scholars and the AABB Foundation's mission of fueling innovative research. Future medical breakthroughs improving patient and donor care depend on it. To learn more about the AABB Foundation and support its mission, visit aabb.org/foundation.