

Blood drives do better with incentives

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Blood drives do better with incentives, says University of Toronto study.
Toronto – It's called the gift of life.

But more people will roll up their sleeves to donate blood if a gift card comes with it.

That's according to a new study from the University of Toronto. It shows a 15 to 20 percent rise in blood drive donations when incentives such as T-shirts, jackets, coupons or gift cards are thrown into the mix.

"It's a pretty remarkable increase," says Nicola Lacetera, an assistant professor of strategic management at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management and University of Toronto - Mississauga who wrote the paper with fellow investigators Mario Macis of Johns Hopkins University and Robert Slonim of the University of Sydney.

The results have been borne out in subsequent studies, he says, including large randomized controlled trials run in the U.S. as well as in Argentina.

"One study at a time, we believe we are building pretty robust evidence that there is a positive response to rewards," says Prof. Lacetera.

Giving incentives did not show an increase in the number of people who were turned away for not meeting donor criteria, the study found. Overall, therefore, incentives did not change the key motivations for donors to give blood.

However, the incentives did have the effect of pulling some donors away from neighbouring drives that did not provide incentives and attracting them towards those that offered the extra perks.

The study looked at data from 14,000 blood drives, involving 500,000 donations, in the United States, as well as evidence from a field experiment. About 30 to 40 per cent of American Red Cross blood drives offer some sort of incentive. U.S. regulations forbid monetary compensation for blood donations used for direct transfusions.

However, fewer than 10 per cent of people donate blood in the U.S. and Canada and shortages are the norm, which is why it's important to look at ways to increase donations. Meanwhile, the World Health Organization has called for all countries to move to a strictly volunteer-based blood collection system, as opposed to systems relying on emergency donors.

"Things are only going to get worse because of the aging of the population," says Prof. Lacetera, adding that most blood is used by the elderly. Improved medical techniques, such as organ transplant procedures, also increase the demand for blood supply.

The study was published in a recent issue of *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*.

Provided by University of Toronto

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