

# hteducation



HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 03, 2013, 4 PAGES

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### THE BLOOD BOND



#### MAKING TIME FOR A CAUSE

It's not easy to study and take time out for volunteer work. Since we are supposed to handle calls 24x7, I plan my day very carefully. When I walk from my hostel to my department at IIT-D, I use that time to talk to donors or volunteers. If I know I am busy with a presentation, I call up another BloodConnect member and ask him or her to take over in my absence. If your commitment levels are high, you can find time for anything

Sumanth Chinthala, BloodConnect member

A bunch of young students from Delhi are making great efforts to push blood donation drives. Ayesha Banerjee meets up with them

When her husband was brought to Delhi from Kolkata and admitted to the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences (ILBS), Medha (name changed to protect privacy), did not know what had hit her. Largely dependent on her husband and struggling with limited finances, she felt her world falling apart when doctors asked her to arrange for blood for her husband's liver transplant. Worried sick about his illness and unable to figure out how to get more than 10 units of blood for such critical surgery, Medha also found herself completely alone in a new city with no support. She knew professional donors would charge money for such a precious resource. Then a doctor informed her about BloodConnect, an initiative managed entirely by the students of the Indian Institute of Technology-Delhi

(IIT-D), Delhi University and IP University. "The moment we heard from Medha, we flashed an emergency call to our members and in a couple of hours 22 people had turned up at ILBS to donate blood," says Sumanth Chinthala, a PhD scholar at the civil engineering department of IIT-D, and an active member of BloodConnect. Medha's husband life was saved, thanks to timely intervention by this youth initiative launched exactly three years ago by IIT-D students Nitin Garg and Utkarsh Kwatra, as part of the National Service Scheme (NSS), the students' community programme. Garg, now a mobile engineer in the US and Kwatra, now in his final year, mathematics and computing, wanted to do "something different". They decided to get into blood donation activities after the IIT-D NSS team kept getting constant requests for

blood from hospitals in the Capital. Chinthala, who was then studying for a masters remembers how they contacted members of their hostels and cobbled together a database of donors and pushed friends to go to the hospitals on weekends to donate blood. Soon, a helpline was set up and the IIT students started reaching out to Delhi University and its colleges for expanding their reach. "Our aim was to ensure that blood-banks were not exhausted. For camps we tied up with hospitals such as the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Deen Dayal Upadhyay, Safdarjung, Ram Manohar Lohia, AIIMS Trauma, the Red Cross and Army Hospital," says Chinthala. Today, BloodConnect has a team of 30 individuals across seven colleges volunteering up to 200 hours a week. They include students from Jesus and Mary College, Miranda

House, Sri Venkateswara College, Hans Raj College and IP University. NGOs helping them include Sapna and CanSupport. BloodConnect has organised 6000 voluntary donations through 57 blood donation camps and helped save over 15,000 lives (with 3000 donations last year). Members have reached out to over 40,000 people through activities such as street plays and awareness sessions. Shweta Veeravalli, a student of economics at Jesus and Mary and a BloodConnect member, says she tries to get students to volunteer for camps. They do not have resources, offices or rooms and depend on just ₹2500 given to them after each camp by the Delhi State Aids Control Society.

**Talk to us**  
Fighting for a cause? Tell us about it on facebook.com/htedu or write to ayesha.banerjee@hindustantimes.com

### 'Amazed at the response'

Saving lives matters

The idea of a helpline, BloodConnect, started when Nitin Garg got a request for blood from a friend. "Going from one hostel door to another, finding donors to help, I was amazed to see such a positive response from all the students. This made me realise that we needed a proper channel for students to participate in such causes and help others. That is when BloodConnect as an online helpline started. Later on we brought about a lot of changes in our model, our plan of action, to tackle the problem of blood shortage. However, it all began for me with a

helpline request," he says. Utkarsh Kawatra was "roped in" by Garg for the helpline through the NSS wing of IIT Delhi. "We met some experienced people working in the field of blood donation and realised that a helpline is not a permanent solution. The problem of blood shortage in the blood banks is not addressed by a helpline. Need-based emergency demands will automatically end if there is enough blood in the bank. With this thought, we decided to focus on blood donation camps as well. IIT came first and soon other colleges joined in for this cause.

#### HOW CAN SUCH AN INITIATIVE HELP?

The founder and co-founder of BloodConnect talk about how students benefit from the movement

- **Making true impact:** Before BloodConnect, some colleges did not even organise blood donation camps. Now young people come forward and realise the impact they have. They spend 20 minutes and save three to four lives!
- **Quick helpline:** Recently there was a blood request from a college where we organise regular camps. There was a need of quite a lot of blood units and their family could not arrange much. They quickly guided the person needing help to a BloodConnect volun-

teer who in turn helped them out

- **Building relations with other colleges:** BloodConnect makes it easier for students from social service/ NSS wings of colleges to coordinate and work on other aspects as well



Nitin Garg (left) and Utkarsh Kawatra

### GET YOUR HAEMOGLOBIN COUNT UP!

A top women's college had enthusiastic volunteers, but just 22 could donate blood as the rest had very low haemoglobin levels

HT Education Correspondent  
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There are a number of challenges for BloodConnect members - and one is finding volunteers for blood donation camps. While women have always been enthusiastic donors, at a recent camp in a top women's college, only 22 students were found with a hemoglobin level of 12.5, which made them eligible to donate. The an alarming number had very low count. Refusing to name the college, another blood BloodConnect member says, "Apart from informing students about blood donation and its importance, we have now started educating

them on improving their health by eating right." Haemoglobin is a protein containing iron in the red blood cells which helps them carry oxygen from the lungs to all parts of our body (tissue) and release it to burn nutrients which power the body. Carbon dioxide is also picked up by the haemoglobin and released in the lungs to be expelled from the body. Low haemoglobin can lead to anaemia or iron deficiency, which can lead to several complications. "Where young men are concerned, we have some problems over the weekend because many of them go drinking on Saturday nights and alcohol is best

avoided 24 hours before donation," says Sumanth Chinthala of IIT-Delhi. For most of the young people reading this, it is important to know that the pressure of looking good or dieting should not keep you from maintaining a healthy diet. Include exercise in your daily routine, but eat well. For improved haemoglobin levels, make sure your diet includes iron rich food such as liver, chicken, pork, fish and eggs (especially the yolk). Non-vegetarians should have as much of green, leafy vegetables as possible, such as mustard, fenugreek, coriander and mint. In pulses, have green gram, Bengal gram, soyabean and lentils (preferably sprouted). Vitamin C also increases the absorption of iron in our body.

More details at [bloodconnect.org](http://bloodconnect.org) and [www.facebook.com/bloodconnect](http://www.facebook.com/bloodconnect)

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