

Donating Plasma to Treat the Next Patient

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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As of June 2, 92% of the nearly 123,000 COVID-19 cases in Illinois, and nearly 67% of the almost 58,000 cases in Michigan are considered recovered. A patient is considered recovered when they are clear of the disease 30 days after initial onset.

As the COVID pandemic grew, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration began allowing providers to treat patients battling the virus with convalescent plasma donated by those who have recovered from the disease. While the use of convalescent plasma has not yet been approved for use by the FDA, it is regulated as an investigational product, which limits how health care providers can offer the treatment to patients.

As an academic, Level I trauma center, OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center in Peoria was the first institution in Illinois that was enrolled in the FDA's Expanded Access program to use convalescent plasma and has been enrolling patients since April.

The donated plasma is able to boost a patient's antibody response to the COVID infection, helping them recover faster and, hopefully, with fewer complications.

"We've had excellent success, we are seeing less patients requiring ICU (intensive care unit) care, less patients requiring intubation, more patients discharging home without ever having to go to the ICU," said John Farrell, M.D., Medical Director, Quality & Safety, OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center

Convalescent plasma is part of a bundle used by OSF Saint Francis to treat the disease, which also includes the use of steroids, zinc, Vitamin D, and anticoagulation over a five day course of treatment. The plasma is given on day two.

As they recover and are discharged home, patients are encouraged to pay-it-forward to help others fight the virus that landed them in the hospital. Plasma from just one recovered donor can help at least three others.

"When we discharge them home we remind them that they can help the next patient a month from now. So a month after they recover, they donate plasma. That plasma will be infused in a patient with the same blood type as them who comes in with the subsequent infection."

For Dr. Farrell, it has been gratifying to see the positive impact convalescent plasma has on the patients he's treated.

"This disease is a chameleon, there's no question that it still has tricks up its sleeve. It still can cause unintended, unanticipated complications. Having developed this coherent, five-pronged response to treatment is really gratifying to know the plan from day one, to be able to look the patient in the eyes and say 'we have a plan, you're gonna be fine.'"

As hospitals have eased restrictions on elective surgeries and are now providing treatment options that were previously postponed, there has been an increase in demand for blood components by hospitals. Meanwhile, potential donors are staying home with blood drives in many areas put on hold. OSF HealthCare works with Mississippi Valley Regional Blood Center (MVRBC) to supply blood components to the majority of its hospitals. MVRBC says the process is safe with donors required to make appointments, face coverings required by donors and staff, and physical distancing practiced by spacing donor chairs.

To schedule an appointment for donation, visit www.bloodcenter.org, or use the Blood Center's mobile app (www.bloodcenter.org/app).