

TIME



Wednesday, Jun. 7, 2006

Africa's Blood Supply

Safe blood is hard to come by in Africa. Not only are most public hospitals and clinics short of the stuff, but the blood they do have is sometimes not stored, transported or screened properly. That can cause big problems in a continent with such a high rate of HIV. The W.H.O. reckons that between 5% to 10% of HIV infections worldwide are caused by unsafe blood transfusions. Obviously HIV in Africa is mostly spread through sex, but having a readily available supply of safe blood would also help slow the spread of the AIDS virus--and other diseases.

I first learned about the big problems in African blood supplies a couple of years ago from Jeff Busch, founder and CEO of [Safe Blood for Africa Foundation](#). His NGO (non-government organization) is doing great work in places such as Botswana and Nigeria, where in the past few years Safe Blood has helped the federal Ministry of Health set up and run a national blood transfusion service.

Today, Safe Blood for Africa is launching something it calls the African Institute of Transfusion Medicine. Based in Johannesburg, the Institute offers free or subsidized training to health care workers from across sub-Saharan Africa. The initial plan is to train more than 500 health care workers a year.

Blood collection and storage may not be cutting edge science but I like Jeff Busch and his colleagues because they've got behind the sort of practical service that can really help Africa. "The African Institute of Transfusion Medicine will enable healthcare workers to develop special skills and knowledge to build a safe and adequate blood supply in Africa," says Busch. "This will have a major impact in fighting the spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa."

The new Institute will select people based on the recommendations of official blood services, Ministries of Health, and WHO. If you work for any of those organizations and are interested, get in touch with Safe Blood for Africa through it's website: www.safebloodforafrica.org

—Simon Robinson