

Making a Difference research essay - Plasma Donations
Mason Waters

Blood donations are pretty common and almost everyone knows what one is. This is great. However, blood donations are not what we are here to talk about. We are here to talk about plasma donations. Which in America is in far greater demand than blood and has become a major problem with donations themselves coming down about 20% after the start of covid 19. When people think about donations one can give blood donations at the top of the list and rightfully so as blood is in demand. But I think as mentioned earlier that we as a people and nation need to look at the plasma donations problem more. The number of people affected by issues that could be solved by plasma ranges in tens of millions. So today I will discuss multiple things to do with plasma donations. But I will mostly be going over why we need more and how it is not only affecting America but also the entire world greatly.

So let's start off with the first question many will have and that is. How bad is the shortage really? Well, what I can tell you is a few numbers that can put it in perspective. For one demand for plasma in America was growing 6-8% according to Julia Press and Robin Lindsay from BusinessInsider. This number was posted in the article from 2021 but seems to not account for post covid demand growth which would be even greater. This would be due to people not going out to give any more donations because they were worried about getting sick. A chart from Statista says that the number of plasma donations in 2019 was around 53 million. That number would then plummet down to 43 million donations which would be around a 20% drop in donations. So what does this all really mean on a national level? Well with how bad the demand was before 2020 we are now seeing plasma demand skyrocket and people who were already

barely getting plasma and were really struggling are now sometimes getting zero plasma. This has caused many who could have been saved with a plasma transfusion are now dying in hospitals and nursing homes. This as you might have guessed is a problem that needs solving and has needed solving for a long time. The population only continues to grow and with it the demand for plasma. This also means however that with the growing population, there are opportunities that exist to combat the issue. But those can be talked about later and we will talk about them because we need to. For now, let us talk about the ways this has affected people in America and then people overseas.

People are struggling to get plasma, which was established earlier in this paper, but just how much does each individual need? Well, let's start off again with some numbers and what they actually mean. The average person with hemophilia according to H. Luke Shaefer from TheAtlantic.com says “a year’s worth of therapy for someone with hemophilia might require the yield of as many as 1,200 donations.” With the number of people who need transfusions in the millions and the number of donations at around 53 million, you might have noticed that the numbers don't truly add up to give nearly enough plasma for all the people who need it in America. This causes as mentioned earlier people to only continue to get sick and it's not just people with hemophilia who need plasma to continue to live. Other conditions which require plasma can vary but a few of the bigger ones start with immune deficiency. This causes people to not be able to create antibodies and where and what creates antibodies? That's right, it's plasma and not being able to create antibodies causes many other diseases to get into the body and cause massive damage to someone's body. For example, a cold for us will maybe make us feel bad for a few days but for someone with immune deficiency, it can and has killed them. Another group

affected by a lack of plasma is cancer patients and this is where the majority of plasma is needed. The conditions I mentioned before cancer are very bad but if there is a silver lining they are pretty rare. Cancer, however, is nowhere close to rare and the amount of people who die of cancer in America is, according to Kendall K. Morgan of Webmd.com 600,000 with the number of new patients growing each year. If we even had 20% more plasma we may have been able to bring this number way down and allow people a chance. Instead many die and there is nothing we can do to save those people. It's a tragedy and it's one that doesn't just affect America, around the world, there are millions who suffer from the shortage. But that begs the question. How are the nations in the old world faring with the shortage?

Well if you are in any country not named Germany you are probably in a crippling shortage. I mention Germany because as far as I've seen they are the only nation in Europe with a surplus of plasma. Most other nations as mentioned earlier are not so lucky with Italy being down over 300,000 donations and falling behind. Darcy Jimenez from PharmaceuticalTechnology.com says "Europe's supply of blood plasma relies heavily on imports". This in part is due to most nations not having a way to give back to the donors. This causes many to view it as something that takes time away from making money and they don't donate. The Czech Republic has gone a route only the U.S. and 5 others have gone in the entire world and that route is to pay donors. PharmaceuticalTechnology.com says, "Only four countries in Europe – Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria and Hungary – allow for monetary compensation of donors and for plasma collection by private entities, while non-financial reimbursement and procurement policies vary across the continent.", they also say "There is a risk the supply will not keep pace with the increasing demand for plasma-derived therapies in

Europe, the report says, and the scarcity of donated human plasma is a key factor in the industry's inability to scale-up the production of the treatments." Paying these plasma donors in the Czech Republic caused the number of donations to multiply by a factor of 7. While they are still in a shortage this has caused that shortage to shrink rapidly. So what does this mean? It means there is a solution to the world's plasma shortage. But why haven't many nations gone this route?

Most nations in Europe if not all have a free or cheap healthcare system that is run by the state. This means there is nowhere near enough money to pay out to its donors and has led to many nations having next to no plasma available. That is unless you outsource the donations to companies and allow them to pay for it. Which is what the U.S., The Czech Republic, and the other 5 have decided to do. This causes many to go give plasma not to help their fellow man but to help themselves, and it works.

The nations who have done this are doing what needs to be done to get donations. That is, they play to people's needs. Many in America give not out of wanting to give, but to give income that they desperately need. This is prevalent in America which gives \$60 on average and during covid got up to over \$100. You can give twice a week for plasma so you can see why many give plasma. It adds the income they need. So while America already does this many nations could start doing this to fix their massive shortage of plasma. If they did, many lives would be saved. But what does any of this mean? Even if it adds income is it really that impactful? Well as mentioned earlier with the Czechs it can do a ton. Nations like Italy which as

mentioned early has a massive shortage could solve their shortage in a few years. But like I said America already does it, so what should we do here?

Well, I'll start off by saying we need to donate more and spread awareness. While we pay the donors it obviously isn't enough to actually entice enough people to donate. Giving more money to donors is the first step in getting people to donate. I need to mention that the restrictions on who is allowed to donate are very strict and while they are getting lighter there are serious problems with the restrictions. People with tattoos make up over 2 percent of the people denied of giving plasma and while I understand some may have problems with the placement of a tattoo. There is no reason that it should make up that amount of denied donors. We need to lighten restrictions and promote these donations as a way to make money especially if you are struggling. It seems wrong but it's what needs to be done.

I'll conclude this with a few of my own thought on the matter and what you as the reader can do to help solve the issue. Personally, I think paying donors is a great incentive, I mean there's a reason that most donors come from low-income families. The awareness is not great however, blood donations are very popular and they should be. But plasma needs its place in the sun too, as it could save so many people. So whoever is reading this, go out and donate if not to save a human, then to line your wallet. If you don't live in a nation that pays then let the government know what needs to be done in order for plasma donations to be feasible. Hopefully soon we will be able to give everyone plasma and therefore a chance to live their lives. Until that day, I urge you all to donate at least once.

Works Cited/sources page

Morgan, Kendall K. "How Many People Die of Cancer a Year?" *WebMD*, WebMD, 19 June 2022, <https://www.webmd.com/cancer/how-many-cancer-deaths-per-year>.

Mikulic, Matej. "Plasma Collections in the US Annually 2007-2021." *Statista*, Statista, 12 Dec. 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/756229/number-of-annual-plasma-collections-in-the-us/>.

H. Luke Shaefer, Analidis Ochoa. "How Blood-Plasma Companies Target the Poorest Americans." *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 15 Mar. 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2018/03/plasma-donations/555599/>.

Jimenez, Darcy. "Donor Compensation Could Improve Europe's Access to Plasma Therapies." *Pharmaceutical Technology*, Pharmaceutical Technology, 6 July 2021, <https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/analysis/donor-compensation-europe-access-plasma-therapies/>.

Press, Julia. "Business Is Booming for the \$24 Billion Plasma Industry - but It May Be Putting Vulnerable Donors at Risk." *Business Insider*, Business Insider, 11 Mar. 2021, <https://www.businessinsider.com/plasma-donating-industry-vulnerable-health-2021-3#:~:text=The%20industry%20is%20worth%20over%20%2424%20billion%20today%2C,medicine%20rises%20by%206%25%20to%208%25%20each%20year>.