The Benign Psychosomatic Influence of Blood Donation on the Personality

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This work is an effort to stimulate interest in a new point of psychosomatic medicine and review the humanitarian work of the Blood Banks. The increasing need for blood demonstrates the necessity for further study to detect means for augmenting the number of volunteer blood donors. Today, in the century of atomic energy, new problems have arisen concerning the treatment of casualties resulting from natural catastrophes and from enemy action. Volunteer blood donors are essential to proper patient care. In the study to be reported, we have considered blood donation from the psychological and psychosomatic point of view.

Material and Method

The 432 unselected volunteer blood donors reported in this paper were studied in the Blood Bank of the Hippocrates Hospital, University of Athens, Greece. The study was carried out using the S.S.P. (Sakelariou’s Scale of Personality), the Rorschach Test, and the T.A.T. (Thematic Apperception Test). The personal histories of the donors were carefully investigated. The donors were examined before, immediately following, and several months after the donation.

Results

It was found that blood donation had profound psychological effects on the individual.

1. An inner need on the part of the donor to establish contact with others was satisfied.
2. A healthier attitude toward chronic personality problems was developed after donating blood. The realization that one had contributed positively to the
saving of a life led to a profound psychological satisfaction and helped to rid the
donor of such complexes as jealousy, sorrow, fear, envy, ambition, resentment,
hatred, insecurity, hostility, worry, anxiety, irritability, dissatisfaction with life,
depression of spirits, lack of enthusiasm, sensitivity, need for approval, need for
love, and inferiority.

3. The donor was able to express friendship and interest in others which had
been previously inhibited by fear.

4. Social activities were increased.

5. A more altruistic approach to life led to a well-rounded personality and was
productive of better health.

6. Many physical complaints derive from a psychological need for affection.
The human contact resulting from blood donation satisfied this need and led to a
sense of physical well being.

7. Blood donation by family groups tended to draw the members together as
an unit and to resolve basic family conflicts.

8. Juvenile delinquents recognized a higher aim in life.

9. A saviour’s feeling developed in the majority of donors with psychotherapeutic
benefit.

Discussion

Contact with sick people leads one to experience a sense of guilt with respect
to oneself. This is particularly true if the individual concerned can be of assistance
to the person who is sick. The idea of guilt develops in the psyche in the form of
obscure conflicts (Pathogenetic factor). There are two conflicting factors, between
which, the personality must decide. The first one, the so-called moral, is the knowledge
that the patient needs help. The second, revolving around the individual
(individualistic), is the unjustifiable hypertrophic selfish instinct. This struggle
between positive and negative psychic factors must be resolved. The result will be
expressed by the individual’s personality as shown in the center of fig. 1. In the case
of blood donation, it is not only a contact of two beings but it is an internal contact
between the conscious ego, and the individual or collective unconscious. This is an
endopsychic phenomenon. The decision to donate blood becomes gradually by
endoproduction, an ideal ego, important for the development of the personality. The
participation of I to the passion (pathos) of you, leads to new personality relationships.

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Before the blood donation, the donor may have been entirely concerned with selfish activities such as his business and daily pleasures. However, after the donation he realizes that he has within himself something of life-saving value which he can provide to a fellow human being. This increases his sense of self worth and establishes close rapport between himself and another person. Therefore the relation of the donor to the recipient of the blood serves as the basis for autocatharsis, autopsychotherapy and the development of the “saviour’s feeling”. Because of this, many blood donors firmly acknowledge that after donating blood they become happier and better adjusted individuals, depositing within themselves, a treasure of psychic elements which gradually build a complete personality.

Summary

Investigating this subject on the basis of modern psychology and psychosomatic medicine, we come to the following conclusion:
1. The blood donor, owing to psychosomatic influences:
   a) Develops a zest for life.
   b) Dissolves repulsed cores of inferiority psyche.
   c) Acquires a “saviour’s feeling” of great psychotherapeutic influence.
2. Many were freed from permanent psychic complexes, such as jealousy, sorrow, fear, envy, ambition, insecurity, worry, anxiety, dissatisfaction with life, depression of spirits, lack of enthusiasm, sensitivity, need for approval, need for love, and inferiority.
3. Families developed a new sense of unity after donating as a unit.
4. Juvenile delinquents discovered a higher aim in life.
5. Impersonal neuroses were improved.
6. The psychotherapeutic effect of donating blood should be realized in psychotherapy.

Generally, blood donation strengthens the donors psychosomatically, makes Medicine more human, and promotes society morally.

References

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8. Id.: The Diagnosis of the Personality, Psychological Laboratory, University of Athens Press, 1953.