

## LETTERS

## HARMFUL MEDICAL OVERUSE

## Transfusing wisely

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Wide ranging campaigns to reduce medical excess, such as Choosing Wisely and Too Much Medicine, are very encouraging.<sup>1</sup> The benefits of liberal transfusion of blood products are often overemphasised and risks underestimated. Initiatives to reduce inappropriate usage of blood products, such as Better Blood Transfusion, have contributed to improvements, such as more than a 20% reduction in red cell usage in England over the past 15 years, but substantial variation in practice and over-transfusion persist.<sup>2-3</sup>

We hope that existing initiatives to increase appropriate blood usage will act synergistically with cross specialty campaigns such as Too Much Medicine. On the basis of the five key questions of Choosing Wisely, the AABB (formerly the American Association of Blood Banks) has released five key recommendations: don't transfuse more units of blood than absolutely necessary; don't transfuse red blood cells for iron deficiency without haemodynamic instability; don't routinely use blood products to reverse warfarin; don't perform serial blood counts on clinically stable patients; don't transfuse O negative blood except to O negative patients and in emergencies for women of child bearing potential with unknown blood group.<sup>4-5</sup> These questions are intended to prompt clinicians to

rethink their ingrained culture of liberal transfusion practice and prompt patients to question why they are being prescribed blood. Established liberal transfusion practice is difficult to change, even with a strong evidence base for restrictive approaches. However, with the momentum of the cultural shift that Choosing Wisely seeks to catalyse, we hope that the five "don'ts" will help patients and clinicians to drive a more evidence based approach to the use of blood products, thereby reducing patient harm from over-transfusion and hospital costs.

Competing interests: None declared.

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- 4 Choosing Wisely. American Association of Blood Banks. [www.choosingwisely.org/doctor-patient-lists/american-association-of-blood-banks/](http://www.choosingwisely.org/doctor-patient-lists/american-association-of-blood-banks/).
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