

One drive at a time: Blood drive replenishes Valley supply

By **Laura B. Martinez - The Brownsville Herald** - August 13, 2020



The second of several new blood and plasma drives organized by the City of Brownsville in collaboration with the city's Sunrise Rotary Club, local hospitals, and community members took place Wednesday afternoon at the Brownsville Event Center.

Hosted by local blood bank Vitalant, the events were organized in a local push to replenish the Lower Valley's supply of blood while also screening donors for COVID-19 antibodies. This week, medical staff did not collect convalescent plasma used to treat patients sick with the virus, but plasma-specific drives are scheduled for next week.

The need for convalescent plasma — the liquid part of the blood which in COVID recoveries contains antibodies that fight the virus — is great in the Rio Grande Valley. The operation to collect the plasma is part of a federally-backed, Mayo Clinic-led study on its effectiveness in treating critically ill COVID patients.

The use of plasma transfusions is nothing new in medicine, but its potential use as a tool against the virus's growth in the body has shown promising signs. Collecting enough means that patients in critical condition will receive one to two doses in time for it to take effect.

Linda Macias of Brownsville lost her mother to the disease after she was unable to get plasma in time. She pushed for city officials to organize more drives to save lives.

She said of her role in organizing the drives this month, "My involvement with this drive is to utilize my experience in order to advocate, support, and educate the importance of

donating plasma. I would like to consider myself as a motivator and encourager throughout this process.”



Macias was aided by the City of Brownsville, which together with the Rotary Club of Brownsville Sunrise, Brownsville Public Health, Valley Baptist Medical Center, and Valley Regional Medical Center organized a series of drives to address both plasma and blood supply.

Next week, drives will be held at various locations in Brownsville. People interested in donating blood or plasma can schedule an appointment by calling (956) 310-2259 or visiting www.bloodhero.com, selecting “Locate a blood drive”, then typing your location information.

According to Mariana Tumlinson, director of community and public relations at Valley Regional Medical Center, patients who have been 28 days recovered from COVID can donate. This includes anyone who received a nasal swab and tested positive and anyone who had symptoms and tested positive.

The need to keep blood banks full is also urgent. “We need to raise awareness,” said Sunrise Rotary’s Vice President Lizandro Garcia. He explained that a lack of education in the community about the importance of blood donation and the difference between plasma, blood, and convalescent plasma donation.

As Vitalant assistant donor care supervisor Ramon Raya explained, people are still getting sick and injured. “Without what we do, hospitals wouldn’t have any blood. They do collect some amount of blood, but not to the scale that we do. We want to have the supply there in the hospital ready for when it’s needed. There’s nothing more important than that.”

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