

Hello. This is Tom Schallert, Administrator at the Northern California Community Blood Bank with a Community Comment.

There have been recent stories and comments regarding Surveys of local health care institutions. Surveys and accreditations are not always consistent in their ratings. The recent ratings of one of our local hospitals was low, but at nearly the same time, their rating in another national survey rated them in the top 55 hospitals in the state of California. Who do you believe? For comparison, the same survey that rated our local hospital low also rated UCLA Medical Center in Southern California at a C Plus. Another national survey had UCLA at Number 1. Different surveys measure different areas but it seems to me to be important to have an actual site visit to truly rate the quality of an organization. The higher rated surveys in both instances, actually visited the hospitals. So have a few grains of salt handy when evaluating surveys.

So with salt in hand, my further comments relate to the recent Accreditation Survey of the blood bank performed by AABB, formerly American Association of Blood Banks. AABB reviewed our Blood Collection, Testing, Processing and Distribution and we are pleased we have been granted AABB accreditation for two more years. The blood bank has been accredited by AABB for several decades. We will be happy to answer any questions the community may have regarding the methodology and results. But remember the salt.

The Accreditation from AABB follows their intensive on-site assessment by specially trained AABB assessors and establishes that the level of technical and administrative performance within our blood bank meets or exceeds the standards set by AABB.

The accreditation procedures are voluntary. We seek Accreditation because the program assists us in achieving excellence by promoting a level of professional and technical expertise that contributes to quality performance and patient safety. It is sort of a practice tool that prepares us for the major regulatory inspections we receive every two years as well.

The Accreditation program uses as the basis for assessment, not only compliance with AABB Standards, but also the Code of Federal Regulations, specific Federal Guidance documents and the California Department of Health Services regulatory requirements for biologics.

In order for us to establish the credibility of our assessments, the AABB Accreditation program is also evaluated by independent organizations. AABB Accreditation has been recognized by the International Society for Quality in Healthcare. It also has been granted “deemed status” as an accrediting organization under the Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments of 1988. This so called “deemed status” indicates the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid have found the AABB Accreditation process to provide reasonable assurance that the facilities accredited by it meet or exceed the conditions required by federal law and regulations.

There are accredited facilities found in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and 80 countries around the world. The Assessors who inspect are working professionals specially trained to perform on-site assessments. They typically have earned advanced degrees and have many years of experience in the field.

Our local blood bank governed by our volunteer board of directors, seeks AABB accreditation because it provides a structured evaluation by our peers so we can gauge our organizations’ level of proficiency to industry standards. It delivers staff education to help us leverage our resources to maximum levels. It gives us an impartial perspective and educational focus as well as enhancing our readiness to deal with change and unforeseen challenges to public health. It also serves as a valuable tool to improve our compliance and operations and finally, it is required by the State of California for licensure purposes.

With that explanation, we hope there is less need for salt in our case. Northern California Community Blood Bank is proud of our renewed accreditation and we are committed to providing a safe and adequate supply of blood and related services to the patients we serve. This has been Tom Schallert with a community comment.