

I recently had a conversation with my daughter about the concepts of value and worth. Specifically “is a box of macaroni and cheese worth more at the neighborhood market than at the grocery store downtown?” One of the things we talked about was the fact that the price of the item was not the only cost associated with the *value* of that box of macaroni and cheese. I’m certainly not an economist - a fact that, based on body language and eye rolling, was becoming apparent to my daughter, but we talked about other *costs* associated with the prices at the two different stores. The neighborhood market is convenient, we can walk there, in fact I can send one of the kids there! The grocery store involves driving, parking, all of those carbon footprint issues - It’s more of a hassle and hassle is a cost.

So, what does this have to do with blood? Another conversation I had recently was about whether I believe that people with Type O- blood have an *obligation* to donate.

A little background: type O- is the universal donor type for red blood cells, meaning that anyone can receive type O- red cells. In practical terms what this means is that anyone arriving at a hospital in need of blood will receive O-. They will then have their blood group and Rh factor determined and be switched to their actual type. Circumstances dictate how soon this happens but the bottom line is that for the Northern California Community Blood Bank 13% of the red blood cells distributed in 2014 were type O- while only 6% of the population has that type.

So...do people with this blood type have an *obligation* to donate their uniquely valuable red cells? That is a question that only that individual can answer. Would I like them to...Probably. But blood donation isn’t just about letting us have something. There are other costs to the donor that have to be considered. Like choosing where to buy groceries, donors will consider logistic issues like schedule and travel but most importantly they must consider the donation experience and their individual feelings about that process. I actually read a study that that said that the individuals most likely to donate blood are those “with a propensity toward blood donation” - Yeah they actually found that the people who donate are the people who want to donate! Groundbreaking stuff. What this doesn’t say is also true though, people who don’t want to donate probable won’t...again –duh. But I would go a step further and say that people with a real fear of donating, those people whose pulse quickens and who sweat at the mention of blood donation,?,

Don’t donate. The last thing we want is for someone to have a bad experience.

A donor who passes out, feels lousy for two days or *really, really* doesn’t like the needle stick? They will tell their friends and they will reinforce the negative aspects of donation to people they know who are considering donating.

We want donors who will be champions for blood donation, who will tell their friends, “YES, Go Donate”.

Do I wish everyone loved donating blood – Absolutely. Do I think everyone should – No Do I think that individuals with a legitimate fear of donating have an *obligation* to do something that may not go well – Of course not.