

Agency for Change Podcast: Kari Lundeen and Cheryl Warholoski, Nebraska Community Blood Bank

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Kari Lundeen: 0:00

Take the nap, you deserve it.

Cheryl Warholoski: 0:04

Be kind. You may never know how your kindness will impact those you meet.

Announcer: 0:13

Welcome to Agency for Change, a podcast from KidGlov that brings you the stories of changemakers who are actively working to improve our communities. In every episode, we'll meet with people who are making a lasting impact in the places we call home.

Lyn Wineman: 0:37

Hey everyone, this is Lyn Wineman, president of KidGlov. Welcome back to another episode of the Agency for Change podcast. So most of you know that I am located in the state of Nebraska and in this state we are used to having severe weather alerts, school closings for snow days and traffic jams related to Husker sports, and as of recently, we have a new alert to add to our lists. We are currently in a declared blood emergency and today we're going to talk with two people who can describe what this situation is and what we can do about it. I'd like to introduce Kari Lundeen, the Enterprise Marketing Manager of the Nebraska Community Blood Bank, and Cheryl Warholoski, the Executive Director of Nebraska Operations at the Nebraska Community Blood Bank. So, Kari and Cheryl, welcome to the podcast. I am eager to have you explain this situation to us. So, Kari, let's start with you as Enterprise Marketing Manager for the Blood Bank. I know you've been out tooting the horn about this blood emergency. Are we still facing a critical situation?

Kari Lundeen: 2:06

Well, I will say that the easy answer is actually we are always kind of facing that critical situation. You know, blood is coming in and blood is going right back out, and what drove this most recent blood emergency was our lack of a stable supply of O negative donors, the universal donor, our platelets. We also had low inventory of B negatives and getting low with some of the other blood types, and when we

see something like that happen, that's when we decide that it's time that we need to alert the community that we are at a blood emergency and we need more people to come in and donate. And really only 3% of the population donates and they take care of a hundred percent of the patients in our hospitals. So you know, ideally, if we could even increase that by even 1%, we could then see no blood emergencies.

Lyn Wineman: 3:04

That's amazing. So if we could get the 80-20 rule in the place here, right, that would be amazing. So I have a confession to make, Kari. First of all, I am O negative and I had to check, like I had to check this morning, because I told my husband I don't know what my blood type is, and he couldn't believe that I didn't know. But part of the reason I don't know is I haven't been a great blood donator, but I can change that. Do you have, like, any advice for people who are listening. What is the simplest way to get involved, make a donation and make a difference?

Kari Lundeen: 3:49

Well, I think the simplest way is hey, we're all busy and don't feel bad that you have not been in a long time, that's OK.

Lyn Wineman: 3:57

Thank you for the grace. Thank you for the grace I appreciate it.

Kari Lundeen: 4:00

Sometimes we see people that we haven't seen in 10 or 12 years. They come back and we just know that lives are busy and you know summertime is upon us and that's always going to be a busy time and everything. If it stays top of mind, give us a call. The easiest way to do that is to either go to our website at ncbb.org Okay, you can schedule your donation, or you can call us directly, 402-486-9414. Our call center, our team members in the call center, are very knowledgeable and can answer lots of questions regarding the donation. If you are curious on a certain medicine that you're taking or travel that you've had recently, they're going to be able to tell you if you are eligible to donate and help get that appointment that is convenient for your time.

Lyn Wineman: 4:54

That's fantastic and we'll get for people who are listening. We'll make sure that phone number and the website are linked up in the show notes on kidglov.com, so those will be there as well. So all right. So you're going to welcome me back. You're not shaming me. I do really appreciate that, Cheryl. I want to toss this next question to you, because maybe there's people like me who get a little bit nervous around blood or have not donated blood before. What advice would you give to somebody who's maybe feeling nervous about making a donation, but they know it's the right thing to do?

Cheryl Warholoski: 5:37

Well, the great news is less than 2% of people that donate have a reaction, and so that is great news. It's not common. Our phlebotomists are experienced. They go through rigorous training. They do this every day, so we have extremely experienced phlebotomists. A great donation experience always begins with hydration and a good meal prior to donating, so that's something important to remember. And if you are nervous about donating, it's great to bring a friend.

Cheryl Warholoski: 6:13

They're good for support and they help calm and distract somebody that might be nervous and it's normal to feel a little nervous, especially the first time or if it's been a long time since you donated and providing exceptional experience for our donors is really number one. We want to make sure that your experience is what you need and that you come back and feel good about your donation.

Lyn Wineman: 6:39

I love that you said that, because a lot of industries talk about providing an exceptional experience and yours would be no different. So that is great to know that you have the donor top of mind and are really thinking about how can we make this a great experience for them. So, Kari, you might have mentioned early on that right now you're looking for that O negative, but are there typically blood types that run low or does it just kind of vary, depending ?

Kari Lundeen: 7:15

Well, yeah, the negative blood type, only 7% of the population has O negative blood, and even though they can donate blood to any blood type, they can actually only receive blood from other O negatives. Yeah, they're givers, they're not takers. So you know that the rare types if you have an RH negative, A negative, B negative, even B positive, are also you know, all rare types. However, you know A positive is one of the most common types in our community and so we do need a lot of A positive donors to take care of A positive patients. So we kind of always have that rule the one, the blood type that's needed the most, is the one that's not on the shelf.

Kari Lundeen: 8:03

So we encourage, no matter what your blood type is to come in and donate.

Lyn Wineman: 8:08

Thank you for clarifying that and, Cheryl, I want to take this back to you. So you talked about what a low percentage of people are currently donating. What really is the impact of one blood donation?

Cheryl Warholoski: 8:22

That's another great question. One unit of blood is separated into three transfusable components, so one donation can impact and help save a life for three different people. So you're not just, it's not just a one-to-one, so it's just it's so important to remember that each of the three products are part of a life-to-one. So it's just, it's so important to remember that each of the three products are part of a life-saving measure. It's crucial and it's critical.

Lyn Wineman: 8:52

That is really a great thing for every one of us to think about, because, you did mention it, we are all busy. There's nobody you talk to right now that is not busy and not trying to figure out how to balance a million different things. And when you think about one donation has the potential to save three lives, that's a big deal, a really big deal.

Kari Lundeen: 9:20

And Lyn, I just want to add that you know it affects a patient's life, but it also directly affects their loved ones, their friends, their family, the people who are surrounding them that can see and know how important their loved one received plasma platelets or the red blood cells. So it really does, the impact is greater than the patient, as we all have people that we care about.

Lyn Wineman: 9:49

Yeah, I mean it feels like kind of in this post COVID era, we've all had an awakening. Everybody wants to make a difference, do something good, do something meaningful. This would be a great way to do that, wouldn't it? So you know, I'm really curious, so you all are educating me quite a lot on the benefits of, which I've always known it was an important thing to do, but to get the details really helps. I'm really curious about Nebraska Community Blood Bank. I have to admit, other than knowing you need people to give donations, I don't know a lot about your work. I'm wondering, Kari, can you just tell us a bit more about Nebraska Community Blood Bank?

Kari Lundeen: 10:31

Yeah, we were actually established in 1968. We are celebrating 55, 56 years. We've been around for quite a while. We have a very local focus. More than 25 healthcare facilities and hospitals are solely provided by donors to Nebraska Community Blood Bank. This includes Nebraska Medicine, which is a level one trauma hospital. They need a lot of blood. They're also a transplant hospital. Methodist Health is also another large hospital entity that we serve and we also serve Bryan Health, which is in multiple communities in and around the state. So you know we definitely have a local focus in and around the state.

Kari Lundeen: 11:19

We also are a part of network of blood banks where, if other blood banks are in need of help, if we've been able to take care of our local needs and meet them, then you know we might be able to help out other blood banks. And I bring up you know, years ago Houston had major, major flooding and during that time, you know people don't associate with the need for blood and flooding necessarily, but what happened was that flooding caused all of their blood banks to close to shut down. There was no electricity and because of that nobody was able to donate blood. So Nebraska Community Blood Bank and other blood banks around the nation were able to send blood to Houston to help patients in their local hospitals because their community couldn't, they physically couldn't. So it's important for us to absolutely take care of our local needs and local patients, and we do a really good job of it. We have a lot of really good, loyal donors that help us out with that.

Lyn Wineman: 12:17

Fascinating. There's so many aspects of your work that I think all of us just take for granted right. And that leads me to a question I like to ask people like the two of you is how did you get into this line of work? For example, I'm imagining the two of you as third graders on the playground, somebody saying what do you want to do when you grow up? And you said I can't wait to go work for the blood bank. Cheryl, let's start with you. Is that how it was for you?

Cheryl Warholoski: 12:50

No, I wasn't thinking about it. In third grade I was still playing out on the playground. But actually I am a registered nurse and my past career was a trauma nurse. I worked in one of the local hospitals here in Lincoln and I actually had the experience of transfusing blood to patients that were in need. I saw firsthand the benefits of somebody receiving a blood and blood products they. I saw the patient get more energy, just feel better in general, and the recovery period was shortened by just one unit of blood. It's major.

Cheryl Warholoski: 13:34

It was a major impact in their life and their family's life, and not once did I ever worry about where the blood came from. It was just always there. And so when the opportunity came up for me to join the Nebraska Community Blood Bank and be part of that team, I was really excited. So I started my career here collecting blood. I was on the floor as a phlebotomist and I started my career here doing that, and now I'm the Executive Director of Operations. So it's been a long and fun journey. It's amazing. It's been an amazing career.

Lyn Wineman: 14:13

That is fascinating and I love that you could. You know the firsthand benefit of having this good blood supply. So Kari, let's toss it to you. How did you get into this?

Kari Lundeen: 14:27

I had no background in health. I actually came from the for-profit world as a salesperson.

Kari Lundeen: 14:35

I worked for Coca-Cola, I worked for Auto Trader and I really wasn't, you know, feeling fulfilled in those careers and I saw a position open up, a sales like position open up with the Nebraska Community Blood Bank that would be the blood drive recruiters. You know they have numbers, there's goals, there's all the things that are involved setting up the blood drives and all the stuff. So there was a little bit of a relationship building, sales building, with the coordinators that intrigued me and I had told my father about it, who was the president of Junior Achievement for 30 plus years,

Kari Lundeen: 15:27

e was right and nearly you know, nine and a half years later I'm here still and it's been just a really fulfilling job to work in an industry where you know that what you're doing is just having a direct positive impact on your community.

Lyn Wineman: 15:47

Absolutely. I have, Kari, heard that many times. We get to talk to a lot of nonprofit marketers and leaders on this podcast and there's just something really fulfilling about doing this type of work that makes the world a better place. So, Kari, you gave us some contact information earlier, but I just want to bring it in one more time. For our listeners who would like to learn more, want to schedule that appointment to give blood, maybe want to come back after they've been away for a long time or a first time, where can they find out more about Nebraska Community Blood Bank and the ability to give a donation?

Kari Lundeen: 16:27

Our website is an amazing resource for not only looking to book your appointment at a convenient location, but the amount of education that is on there where you can read recipient stories. But you can also learn the very intricate parts about our blood. Again, learn more about what platelets are and how important those are to donate for patients. Learn more about the red blood cells and how important those are to donate for patients. Learn more about the red blood cells and just the impact that it has. So ncbb.org is our website. There's also eligibility information on there that can give you some idea or questions that you might have. So that's a really great resource to utilize. I would also say find us on our social media channels.

Cheryl Warholoski: 17:13

You know, we are on Facebook, we're on Instagram, we are on YouTube, we are on X. So you know, find us in those places, because we always have content and material. That is, some of it is educational, some of it is inspirational, and then you know, of course, is educational, some of it is inspirational, and then you know, of course. Lastly, give us a call 402-486-9414. Very knowledgeable team members that can answer most any question.

Lyn Wineman: 17:42

Fantastic. We'll get all of those links once again in the show notes. And since you said the word inspiration, I'm going to take you both to my very favorite question. We are coming up on our 200th podcast and we've asked this question on every single episode, and that is, I would like both of you to give us some original words of wisdom to inspire our listeners. And, Kari, I'd love to start this one with you. Can you give us an inspirational quote?

Kari Lundeen: 18:16

The inspiration is probably more of a self-care and I will say my quote would be take the nap, you deserve it.

Lyn Wineman: 18:26

I love it. People are abandoning the podcast all over right now to just go take that nap. No, I'm sorry, hang on everyone. We're just about done. Take the nap, you deserve it. I love it. I think a nap is a modern day luxury at this point in time. Cheryl, let's hear from you. Can you give us an inspirational quote?

Cheryl Warholoski: 18:48

Well, I just woke up from my nap. Thank you, Kari. Be kind, you may never know how your kindness will impact those you meet.

Lyn Wineman: 18:58

Love it Very good, I love both of those. Take the nap, you know what? You'll be much kinder after you take the nap. I know that to be true as well. All right, one last question here, as we wrap up this great conversation today. I'd love to hear from each of you what is the most important thing you would like our listeners to remember about the work that you're doing and who'd like to start. Alright, Cheryl, you go first.

Cheryl Warholoski: 19:27

I'd like our listeners to know that we can't do this job without them. Their donation, your donation, is the gift of life, and a blood donation is truly an altruistic gift that an individual can give to others. So please consider donating blood.

Lyn Wineman: 19:44

Wow, what a call to action. Very nice, very nice. Kari, what would you like everyone to remember about this great work that you're doing?

Kari Lundeen: 19:52

Oh, I think that something that to remember is that blood, donating blood, is not tangible. You don't get to see the end result most of the time, and so you know it's more of a very stealthy way to save lives. And, to reiterate Cheryl's point, their blood is not manufactured. We are the only ones that can give. We just ask our you know fellow fellow men and women beside us to step up and donate blood with us.

Lyn Wineman: 20:27

There you have it, folks. I think today we've heard they can't do it without us. Every donation has the potential to save three lives and it's a stealthy way to support your community. So thank you for that. Kari and Cheryl. I fully believe the world needs more people like you, more organizations like Nebraska Community Blood Bank. Thank you so much for taking the time to share with us today and for doing the important work that you do.

Kari Lundeen: 20:58

Thank you, Lyn. We're really excited that we were able to join you.

Cheryl Warholoski: 21:02

Thank you, Lyn, it was very much appreciated.

Announcer: 21:07

We hope you enjoyed today's Agency for Change podcast To hear all our interviews with those who are making a positive change in our communities or to nominate a changemaker you'd love to hear from. Visit kidglov.com at K-I-D-G-L-O-V.com to get in touch, as always. If you like what you've heard today, be sure to rate, review, subscribe and share. Thanks for listening and we'll see you next time.