



As corporates, we have a responsibility to give back to the communities we serve. Over the last few years, [Bird & Bird](#) has graciously granted me the time every two weeks to donate blood platelets for those in need. As personally fulfilling as my platelet donations are, it pales in comparison to the benefits associated with these platelets for the patients on the donor receiving end.

I decided to share some information about platelet donation to raise awareness for both platelet donation and corporate responsibility.

What are Blood Platelets?

Like the lungs or heart, blood is a critical component of our bodies. Blood transports oxygen throughout the body, and helps our organs and tissues exchange waste products' nutrients. Blood cells are comprised of red blood cells (RBCs), plasma and platelets.

Platelets are small cells that help the blood form clots and stop bleeding. Clotting stops us from bleeding too much from an injury. When platelets are low, serious or life-threatening bleeding can occur. These platelets are essential for millions of people across the UAE in their battle to survive and fight chronic diseases, cancer, and serious injuries.

Why Platelet Donations are needed

Unlike medicine, blood products cannot be created in a laboratory. Sometimes, extra blood is as vital to patient care as medicine. Platelets are particularly important for cancer patients. As a patient undergoes their cancer treatment their bone marrow may become damaged. When their blood platelets become low, a condition called thrombocytopenia occurs, these patients require platelet donations.

Platelets have a much shorter shelf life than whole blood. Whole blood donations can be stored at 4 degrees Celsius for up to 42 days. However, platelet donations can only be stored at room temperature for up to five days. As such, it's essential for platelet donors to come in regularly, so there is always a fresh supply for patients in need.

According to the American Red Cross, every 15 seconds someone needs platelets. It's essential for healthy individuals to donate their platelets to help those in need.

Who do Platelets Help?

My first experience donating blood was very rewarding. After I donated blood I heard about platelet donation. With the support of Bird & Bird, I was able to donate every two weeks to help patients around the UAE in need of platelet transfusions. After my first platelet donation, I was inspired to learn more about the benefits of donating blood and platelets.

Blood platelets can be used to help:

- Platelets provide cancer patients with the additional strength they need to keep fighting. As cancer patients undergo treatment, one of the major side effects is a low platelet count. Since platelets help our blood to clot, without a platelet transfusion, cancer patients may face life-threatening bleeding.
- Platelets transfusions can be the difference between life and death in a patient. Platelets supply strength to patients with blood disorders. Additionally, transplant patients often require platelet transfusions.

How do I donate Platelets?

Platelet donation is a bit different than donating blood. While most blood donation centres take walk-ins, platelet donation typically requires an appointment. Unlike donating blood, platelet donation requires both arms. During a platelet donation, blood is drawn from one arm, and once the platelets are obtained using a special machine, the remaining blood elements return to your body through your other arm. The entire donation process lasts about three hours (including paperwork and preparation).

In Dubai, the Latifa Hospital Blood donation Centre now has new technology that requires only one arm, and works on a draw and return system.

Here's how it works:

- A small amount of blood is drawn from your arm and goes into a blood separator machine.
- Next, the machine spins the blood rapidly, which forces the platelets to separate from the other blood components.
- These extracted platelets are placed into a sterile, single-use plastic bag.
- In the meantime, the rest of the blood sample blood, to include the plasma, red cells, and white cells, is returned to the donor.
- This process is repeated a few times during the platelet donation.

While the donation process takes longer than a traditional blood donation, one platelet donation is equivalent to what would normally be collected from five blood donations. In fact, platelet donations can extract enough platelets for two or three patients. Best of all, platelet donors are permitted to donate their platelets up to 24 times a year (compared to the typical 6 permitted yearly traditional blood donations)

Is Platelet Donation Painful?

People often ask me if it's painful to donate platelets? Essentially, it's no more painful than a traditional blood draw. The initial prick of the needle into each arm is a bit uncomfortable, but the benefits of the draw far outweigh this momentarily pinch of pain. In fact, a smaller needle is used for platelet donation than is used in traditional whole blood donations.

On the flip side, because you're receiving fluids and red cells back after donating platelets, some donors say they feel less sluggish after their donation! Furthermore, donating platelets is safe. Platelet donations are performed in a highly-controlled environment by professionally trained staff. Each donation is collected through a new, sterile needle that is used once and then discarded.

Who Can Donate Platelets?

Depending on your local laws, you can start donating platelets around the age of 17 years old. Eligibility requirements for platelet donation are the same as a whole blood donation. As long as you meet the minimum requirements for donating whole blood, you should be able to donate platelets.

For more information you can visit the [DHA website](#) or by visiting Latifa Women and Children Hospital 800-342 (800-DHA) where I donate.

Why Donate Platelets?

Donating platelets was a simple choice for me. I am lucky to have my health, and I feel it is my responsibility to be generous in all aspects of my life. However, my platelet donation is made possible thanks to my employers at Bird & Bird. Their support has allowed me to dedicate two hours every two weeks to make my platelet donations.

If you are interested in helping others in their fight to obtain health and happiness, contact your local blood donation centre to learn more about where to make platelet donations. You'll be glad you did!