

# INTERVIEW WITH DR. FRANZ WEINAUER

Medical Director, Blood Donation Service of the Bavarian Red Cross

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**Q How is the German blood and plasma donation system structured?**

The particularity of the German system is that it is based on four organizations for the collection of blood, blood components, and plasma for manufacturing medicinal products. These four entities include:

- German Red Cross organizations
- Hospital blood banks
- Private (independent) collectors
- Industry collectors

The German Transfusion Act, together with the provisions of the Drug Law, regulates the production, quality, and licensing of all medicinal products, including blood products. The German Medical Association, in cooperation with the Paul-Ehrlich-Institut, establishes the guidelines for the collection, manufacture, and use of blood and blood components. In Germany, women can donate blood up to four times each year, whereas men can donate up to six times annually. Since the revision of the guidelines in 2017, plasma can now be donated up to 60 times a year.

**Q Do these four organizations work together?**

Yes, these four collecting entities coexist and work together. They are all members of the German umbrella association

Arbeitsgemeinschaft Plasmapherese e.V. (ARGE). The mission of the ARGE is to promote safe plasma collection practices in Germany, with a focus on donor health and product safety to ensure patient access to safe products according to the current state of science and technology, in addition to scientific assessment of various aspects of plasmapheresis.

The ARGE currently has 21 members operating 92 plasma collection centers in 15 German states. The collaboration among the organizations is also reflected in the ARGE Board, which is composed of one representative from each of these collecting entities. The chair is currently Dr. Kirsten Seidel from CSL Plasma, and I serve as vice chair.

Together we work on different projects and have supported scientific studies such as SIPLA I and II on the safety of long-term intensive plasmapheresis in donors. This coexistence makes the German system work well and helps to ensure patients access to care.

**Q Is Germany confronted by ethical concerns because donors are compensated?**

The particularity of the German system is that it allows a fixed-rate monetary donor compensation. This is the so-called “Aufwandsentschädigung,” a German term that designates the fixed-rate compensation for expenses.



The ARGE Board met with Municipal Councilor of Kassel Renate Fricke (fourth from left) at the 2017 ARGE Congress in Kassel (Germany). Board members (from left to right) are Dr. Franz Weinauer, Bavarian Red Cross; Dr. Kirsten Seidel, CSL Plasma; Prof. Dr. Cornelius Knabbe, Hospital of the Ruhr-University Bochum; and Dr. Matthias Eberhard, TMD Kassel.

It is anchored in the German Transfusion Act and is in line with the voluntary and unpaid donation principle. The establishments are free to choose if they compensate their donors or not.

In the case of whole blood donation managed by Red Cross blood centers, there is no need for remuneration at all as we drive with our mobile teams to a location close to the donor. On the other hand, our experience has shown that plasma donation without compensation is not working. Donors have to come to the plasma center, the process is

lengthy, and donors have to be committed, so it is justified to compensate plasma donors for their time and inconvenience. Otherwise, the supply with plasma products would not be achievable and thus justifies ethically the compensation.

**Do you think that there is crowding out happening in Germany, meaning do you think there is a loss of blood donors due to the activities of private sector plasma collectors?**

In the past years, Germany has observed a decrease in blood donations. However this is related to the progress in surgical practices and the introduction of patient blood management. These decreasing figures have been observed in many European countries, even in countries that do not have plasma collection programs in place.

It should also be mentioned that blood and plasma donors are not part of the same donor population. We observed that blood donors are on average older than plasma donors.

When we were preparing the opening of our plasma donation center in Würzburg, we sent letters to 1,200 of our blood donors (blood group AB) in the area, and in the end, we only got a handful of persons who actually came to donate. This is probably also related to the donation frequency. On average, a blood donor donates twice a year. A plasma donor donates on average 20 times a year. This is a whole different commitment and explains why it is more appealing to the younger population.

## PLASMA FOR FRACTIONATION

German plasma donation in years by collecting entity. Figures of the Paul-Ehrlich-Institut.

