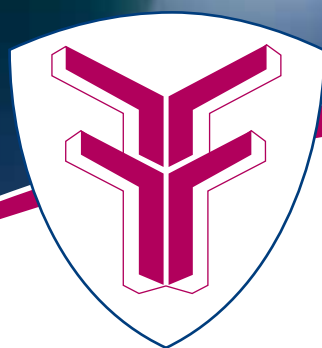


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Editor's note

Beryl Armstrong

This note is to update AfSBT members briefly on an important project the AfSBT is leading: Step-wise Accreditation of Blood Services in Africa. This project was initiated a few months after the 5th International Congress of the AfSBT in Nairobi (June 2009). An international task team met in Nairobi in October last year and agreed on the principle to develop three levels culminating in full accreditation. This project is a joint venture of the AfSBT and international and African experts and institutions involved in accreditation. The national blood services of the countries affiliated to the AfSBT are key stakeholders.

The project and the documented outline of the three levels were developed further during the South African National Blood Transfusion Congress in Johannesburg (November 2009) and in February 2010 a task team met in Cape Town to confirm the outlines (summaries), taking into account comments from an international advisory group, and to start the task of developing the standards documents for the three levels. The completed documents are ready to be circulated for information and comment, as will audit checklists in the months to come.

The accreditation programme envisaged is not simply an inspection of blood services to an accepted standard and the issuing of a "certificate of accreditation". The aim of the programme is to assist African blood services to improve the sufficiency and safety of their blood supply by introducing quality systems for donor recruitment and selection, blood collection and the processing, testing, distribution and the administration of blood and blood products.

In summary, the three levels are as follows:

1. Level 1: minimum requirements
2. Level 2: intermediate requirements
3. Level 3: full accreditation – international standard

Key to the system is the concept of "step-wise accreditation", recognising that in Africa blood services operate on very different levels and that all cannot be inspected and judged on the same level. An individual service can decide its position in the accreditation system and be judged at the appropriate level of development. The accreditation process, by level, is not discriminatory but must be seen as supportive in that it gives the service the opportunity to develop in a structured manner to the next level.

The accreditation authorities will be internationally recognised bodies that agree to audit blood services according to the step-wise accreditation system. The AfSBT itself will not fulfil such a role but will facilitate the process by providing guidance and support to participating blood services, and collaborating with the accreditation authorities. The AfSBT envisages that regional African accreditation authorities will be utilised for this step-wise process. It is the aim of the AfSBT, with the help of international institutions, also to develop regional accreditation auditors and inspectors.

It is planned to provide ongoing information on this project in following issues of *Africa Sanguine*.