Dear Editor,

the main priority of voluntary blood donor associations is to spread the practice of donating blood and its components, thus guaranteeing self-sufficiency in these products; this can be achieved principally through increasing the number of organised and periodic donors.

According to some statistical estimates, the population of over 60-year olds will increase from 998,142 in 2006 to 1,611,447 in 2046 (+613,305), while the population between 18 and 60 years old will decrease from 5,418,693 to 4,045,176 (-1,373,517). On the basis of these demographic projections, we considered a more significant involvement of people from other parts of the world, with different cultures, religions and ethnicities.

In our opinion, the pathway of intercultural harmony, integration and interactions should undoubtedly start from aspects of health care, which must be based on scientific analysis and careful evaluation of the existing literature, but must have a strong social value.

Although the opinions above are not exhaustive and worthy of further analysis, they do stimulate reflection and allow us to make some considerations on a subject, that is perhaps a novelty only for us, and examine it without preconceptions or prejudices. Where the development of a culture of donation passes through the awareness and the responsible involvement of the individual, health care issues constitute an important but not unique criterion, that must guide us.

For example, if we take risk behaviours, as we understand them, these can have completely different facets depending on the person’s culture and/or religion, which are not necessarily linked to those of the country of origin. This problem is also clearly present in already existing donors.

Finally, participation in the development of voluntary activities and unpaid, periodic donations is a significant and concrete form of interaction, efficiently promoted by voluntary blood donor associations.

On this background and based on a predominantly anthropological approach, we set up the "Project to promote blood donation in a multicultural society". The stages of this projects were as follows:

- the establishment of a scientific committee (see appendix), co-ordinated by the author of this letter and supervised by the anthropologist Annamaria Fantauzzi, with the active participation of associations of the Latin-American, Romanian, Moroccan and Sikh communities, as well as the Union of Islamic Communities in Italy (UCOI);
- the first meeting, held in January of this year, during which the following aims and strategies were decided;
- organisation of a meeting: "Blood donation in a multiethnic society", held on March 17th in Milan. This meeting was aimed at representatives of groups and associations of foreigners and voluntary blood donor associations, community leaders and/or reference figures for foreign citizens. Some of these community figures were speakers at the meeting. There were 119 participants [52 from the Italian Association of Voluntary Blood Donors (AVIS), 10 from the Policlinico Hospital in Milan, and 57 from the different communities involved, including the Philippine community]. The meeting was followed by a multiethnic buffet.

The following aims have been defined for this project.

1. Promote the culture of solidarity and donation.
2. Promote the practice of donating blood within various communities of foreigners, while respecting their different cultures and religions.
3. Spread clear information and indications on how to get to know AVIS and other donor associations and their actions in local, national and international settings.
4. Set up and promote activities aimed at creating a
network between the people involved in order to:

a) exchange information, experiences, strategies and
to enhance awareness;
b) facilitate involvement and meetings;
c) promote joining AVIS and other associations;
d) participate in meetings.

5. Create the instruments for carrying out campaigns to
increase awareness within reference points for foreign
families and in meeting places.

6. Facilitate the availability of information on the rare blood
groups.

7. Create networks for the development of cultural and
scientific exchanges with the countries of origin of the
foreign communities (for example, reciprocal visits,
exchange of informative material, relations between rare
blood group banks, invitations to particularly significant
moments of our association, such as assemblies,
meetings, exhibitions and celebrations).

At the end of the meeting, we set up a mixed working
group, that will work to produce material, in different
languages, to promote blood donation and to organise
various manifestations, one of which could take place
concomitantly with the World Blood Donor Day on June
14th, 2007.

Appendix

Project leader
- Lombardy and Piedmont Regional Sections of AVIS,
in collaboration with the Lombardy Regional Bank of
Rare Blood Groups and the Association of Donors of the
Policlinico Hospital, Milan.

Scientific Committee
- Sebastian Asaftei, Orthodox Church (Turin)
- Mohamed Bousetta, AMECE Association – Morocco
- Giorgio Dall’O, President of AVIS, Piedmont Region
- Annamaria Fantauzzi, anthropologist, La Sapienza
  University of Rome - EHESS Paris, Head of the
  Observatory on the culture of blood donation by
  immigrants of the National (AVIS);
- Stelian Ionescu, Association of Romanians in Italy
  (Milan)
- Yassin Lofoum, Young Muslims in Italy – JUCOR
- Vincenzo Saturni, President of AVIS, Lombardy Region
  (co-ordinator)
- Sukhdev Singh, Sikh community (Cremona)
- Maria Pilar Venque, Latin-America Association
- Giorgio Marmiroli, Blood Donors’ Association of the
  Policlinico Hospital (Milan)

AVIS representatives
- Igino Arboatti, Health Care Director – AVIS, Piedmont
  Region
- Giampietro Brighi, Health Care Director – AVIS, Lombardy Region
- Aldo Cardani, Councillor – AVIS, Lombardy Region –
  School representative
- Claudio Cozzo, Councillor – AVIS, Lombardy Region
  – Youth policies representative
- Sandro Fisso, Administrator – AVIS, Piedmont Region
- Felice Monin, Vice-President – AVIS, Lombardy Region
- Lucilla Perico, Councillor – AVIS, Piedmont Region –
  Head of Training.
- Tiziana Tacchini, Vice-President – AVIS, Piedmont Region

Representative of the Regional Rare Blood Groups
Bank:
- Fernanda Morelati, Chief of the Regional Rare Blood
  Groups Bank
- Maurizio Marconi, Director of SIMT, Policlinico
  Hospital, Milan

Representative of the Blood Donors’ Association of
the Policlinico Hospital, Milan
- Giorgio Marmiroli, Vice-President
- Giovanni Cremonesi, Health Care Director

Organising Secretariat
- Laura Cubeddu - Danila Fiume, AVIS, Lombardy Region

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