

Background

In December 2011 an amendment to the Law on practitioners in health care was passed in the Dutch Parliament. This amendment legally allows for reallocation of certain medical tasks to physician assistants (PAs) and nurse practitioners for a trial period of 5 years. The legal amendment does not specifically name transfusion. The Netherlands Association

of Physician Assistants (NAPA) takes the position that prescription of blood components is a task for physician assistants. Before the passing of this legal amendment TRIP National hemovigilance and biovigilance office received some reports of adverse events relating to PAs prescribing blood components. It is not known how many hospitals employ PAs and if they prescribe transfusion.

Incident 1 (prior to legal amendment)

A transfusion safety officer on routine check of the transfusion lab system found that transfusion had been ordered and administered on a Hb level of 8.3 mmol/l (13.7 g/dl). The ordering PA remembered prescribing transfusion on a Hb level of 4.2 mmol/l (6.8 g/dl). It was found that the PA mistook the erythrocyte count for Hb level. Analysis revealed that this error was due to the computer system: when scrolling in electronic patient records labels of lab parameters and their corresponding normal values disappeared from screen.

Incident 2 (prior to legal amendment)

On examination of a paper transfusion ordering form it was noted by the blood transfusion laboratory that the transfusion had been ordered and signed by a PA. According to hospital laboratory protocol a transfusion may only be ordered and signed by physicians. The PA assumed that ordering transfusion was part of the job description; this task was however not specified in the job description. The supervisor had not realised that tasks and responsibilities had not been properly defined.

Legal amendment December 2011: reallocation of medical tasks and responsibilities to Physician Assistants

Legal authorisation to carry out

- Surgical procedures
- Endoscopy procedures
- Injections
- Puncture biopsies
- Elective cardioversion
- Defibrillation
- Prescription of medication



Refers to procedures that

- are within the PA's competency
- are of limited complexity
- are routine
- are of low risk
- are carried out according to treatment standards and protocols

Method

Dutch hospitals were surveyed regarding employment of PAs and their tasks relating to blood transfusion prescription. Added to the TRIP 2012 annual survey of blood component use all 98 Dutch hospitals were asked

- whether they employed PAs
- whether PAs prescribed blood transfusions.

The survey was done by means of a password protected online form.

Results

Do hospitals employ PAs?

yes	67	68%
no	27	28%
did not reply	4	4%
Total	98	100%

Do physician assistants prescribe blood transfusions?

no	34 (51%)	
yes	19 (28%)	
yes, in certain situations	12 (18%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under supervision 6 • Certain medical specialties 4 • After in-house training 1 • Transfusion committee still discussing responsibilities 1
PA's task not specified	1	
PA's task not known	1	

Conclusion

The majority of Dutch hospitals employ physician assistants. However the scope of their responsibilities relating to prescription of blood components is not uniform. It is advisable for hospitals to clearly lay down responsibilities of PAs in their institution and to ensure that PAs receive appropriate training for prescribing blood transfusion.