Labelling system to match blood to patients

A labelling system using unique numbers to match each unit of blood to the relevant patients can help prevent mis-identification in blood transfusions. The labelling system (which is sometimes called the ‘red label’ system) is designed to prevent patients receiving the wrong unit of blood through the wrong sample being received in the laboratory, and also forces staff to check the unit of blood against the patient and their wristband or photo identification (ID) card at the patient’s side (or at the bedside). The system can be adapted to suit local circumstances and is based on a set of unique numbered labels per patient.

Each set of self-adhesive labels is assigned to one patient for a single episode of care. This unique number provides a direct link between blood sample, patient and cross matched blood. Also, for patients whose identity is unknown, it provides a further link between the blood sample and patient. This helps to prevent incorrect transfusions caused by samples being labelled with another patient’s details or the wrong patient being bled.

‘UN label’ refers to the unique numbered labels.

**Taking blood samples**

- Collect blood sample from patient: group and save or cross match samples only
- Take a set of self-adhesive UN labels
- Attach one UN label to the request form/card
- Attach one UN label to the sample tube
- Insert one UN label into a new patient wristband/photo ID card
- Attach the remaining UN labels to the back of the request card and place with the blood sample in the specimen bag
- Send the blood sample and request card to the laboratory

**In the laboratory**

- Perform the standard checks as required by the British Committee for Standards in Haematology (BCSH)
- When the blood is issued, attach one UN label to each unit of blood

**Administering blood**

- A member of healthcare staff should perform final (bedside) identity checks as per blood transfusion policy
- Check the patient’s UN label on their wristband or photo ID card with the UN label on the unit of blood
- If all the checks are correct, do not administer blood and contact the laboratory immediately. In an emergency, use emergency blood stock

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This flowchart provides an easy to follow reference for staff using this labelling system.