

# First-time blood donors: waiting for the roller coaster

June 14 2016

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Volunteer gives blood. Credit: Red Cross Australia

Have you ever bought a ticket to ride a roller coaster? Was your initial bravado overtaken by creeping doubt as the long queue moved slowly towards the gate?

University of Queensland School of Psychology researcher Associate Professor Barbara Masser has identified a similar sensation for first-time [blood](#) donors.

Her research with the Australian Red Cross Blood Service takes on

particular importance during National Blood Donor Week from 12 to 18 June.

"There is a voice at the back of new donors' heads saying 'You don't have to do this. You could just not do it, that's OK'," Dr Masser said.

"So we're trying to intervene in that period and say: 'We know. We recognise you are thinking all these things. It's not that unusual, and here are things you can do to manage those doubts'.

"We've designed materials to address key anxieties such as fear of the process, pain, the potential for physical reactions, and the fear of ineligibility."

Dr Masser has collaborated with the Blood Service for 14 years, identifying psychological factors that form eagerness and reluctance to donate blood.

Her recommendations are underpinning a communications strategy which starts this month.

Communications materials were tested on more than 3600 new donors, either as a hard copy brochure or an email brochure alone, or in combination with a phone call.

"When a first-time donor makes an appointment to give blood, their initial good intentions can be undermined by worries about the approaching donation," Dr Masser said.

"Sometimes they don't follow through with their donation as a result.

"The messages we provide are like we're holding their hand in the [roller coaster](#) queue."

Blood Service marketing team members were integral in the adaptation of the research findings.

Blood Service director of marketing Alyson Pearce said the research would lead to more first-time donors.

"We were really happy with the findings as this approach dramatically improved the attendance rate among donors in the research group," Ms Pearce said.

The research is published in the journal *Transfusion*.

**More information:** Barbara Masser et al. Improving first-time donor attendance rates through the use of enhanced donor preparation materials, *Transfusion* (2016). [DOI: 10.1111/trf.13496](https://doi.org/10.1111/trf.13496)

Provided by University of Queensland

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