1st September 2021

**IBTS publishes 2020 Annual Report**

The IBTS today (Wednesday) published its Annual Report for 2020.  “The impact of COVID-19 on recruitment of new donors has been significant for the IBTS.  The IBTS had to respond quickly to a rapidly evolving situation, introducing an appointments system for donors virtually overnight and maintaining the national blood supply by continuing to operate donation clinics throughout the country in a manner that ensured the safety of our donors and our people. Internally we had to adapt to new ways of working, implementing new work rosters, mobilising hundreds of staff to work remotely, changing roles for some staff, sourcing volumes of PPE, developing and implementing guidelines to support staff, answering hundreds of queries and of course making sure everyone was kept up to date with all the necessary public health and organisation guidance, said IBTS Chief Executive Orla O’Brien.

The IBTS had commenced the consultation process for our new strategic plan ***Connections that Count: Developing the IBTS 2021 - 2025*** before COVID-19 arrived and notwithstanding the additional pressures on the organisation during the year to continue to maintain the blood supply and our other services through varying degrees of restrictions, work on our strategy development continued and was approved by the Board. Connections that Count sets the organisation’s strategic direction for the next five years and will ensure that the IBTS remains at the forefront of transfusion medicine. The strategy development also provided the opportunity to renew our mission, vision and values.

“Unfortunately, some traditions could not take place in 2020. Donor awards ceremonies had to be cancelled as a consequence of the COVID-19 public health restrictions,” she added.

“The first IBTS Research and Development strategy was developed in 2020.   The reorganisation of research at IBTS will enable staff to make significant contributions to the scientific literature in the field of transfusion medicine,” said Dr Stephen Field, IBTS Medical & Scientific Director.

“The tissue typing (HLA) laboratory introduced the next generation sequencing (NGS) methodology which provides better resolution of the highly polymorphic and complex HLA genes. This improved and state of the art tissue typing technology will provide for better matching of stem cell donors and patients requiring transplant.

“The virology laboratory has implemented SARS CoV 2 antibody testing which allows characterisation of convalescent plasma. A seroprevalence study on donors throughout the pandemic has also been undertaken and will be published later in 2021. Tests for malaria antibodies have also been validated in this laboratory in readiness for a recruitment campaign for donors of African ancestry many of whom have lived in malaria endemic areas of the world. These donors are required to improve Rh matching of blood required for Sickle Cell patients.

“In 2017 IBTS reduced a permanent deferral to 12 months for men that had sex with men (MSM) and other high risk activities including people with partners from areas with high prevalence of HIV (sub-Sahara Africa). Other blood establishments in Europe and America are making changes to their deferral for MSM and it was felt that this needed to be reviewed in Ireland. A committee with independent members has been convened to review the evidence and make a recommendation to the IBTS,” he added.

ENDS

Full text of the 2020 Annual Report is available [here](https://www.giveblood.ie/media/publications/annual_reports/ibts-annual-report-2020.pdf)

**2020 IBTS facts at a glance**

73,023 donors gave 123,304 whole blood donations

Almost 55% of whole blood donors are male

4,663 new donors joined the bone marrow registry in 2020

60 Irish patients received a stem cell transplant in 2020

New donors declined by 57% in 2020 due to COVID 19 restrictions