Keeping Blood Where It Belongs

Blood loss has always been a major concern in surgery, and controlling intraoperative bleeding to minimize blood loss is crucial to the success of any surgery and the patient’s recovery. Naturally, the less blood that a patient loses the better; and that is especially true when taking into account patients’ growing concerns over the safety of blood transfusions.

Since the AIDS epidemic of the 1980’s there has been a prevalent public fear of infection from blood transfusions, and the requests for bloodless surgeries have been on the rise in recent years not just from religious objectors to transfusions, but also from those simply seeking peace of mind. Adding to this fear is the increasing evidence that, despite popular opinion, blood transfusions do not always improve surgery outcomes. A recent study led by the Virginia Commonwealth University Medical Center showed that patients who received platelet transfusions during coronary bypass surgery were more likely to require longer hospital stays and bore a greater risk of infection, post-operative bleeding, stroke and death.

While autologous blood transfusions have been increasing in popularity and, in the process, improving patient outcomes and stress levels, it still involves putting outside blood into the patient. Thus, the risk of infection, though minimized, is still there. Basically, the best way to avoid the potential risks of blood transfusions is to avoid the transfusions all together, and the best was to accomplish this is to conserve the patient’s blood throughout the surgery.