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Strategic Approaches to Safe and Effective Transfusion Medicine: Integrating Patient-Centered Management

Güvenli ve Etkili Transfüzyon Tıbbına Yönelik Stratejik Yaklaşımlar: Hasta Merkezli Yönetimin Entegre Edilmesi

Mustafa Altındiş[1], Mehmet Fatih Orhan[2], Nesrin Demircan[3]

[1] Sakarya University, Faculty of Medicine, Medical Virology, Department of Medical Microbiology, Sakarya, Türkiye

[2] Sakarya University, Faculty of Medicine, Department of Pediatric Hematology and Oncology, Sakarya, Türkiye

[3] Sakarya University, Institute of Health Sciences, Blood Banking and Transfusion Medicine, Sakarya, Türkiye

ORCID ID: Mustafa Altındiş: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0411-9669, Mehmet Fatih Orhan: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8081-6760, Nesrin Demircan: https://orcid.org/0009-0002-0194-6853

***Sorumlu Yazar / Corresponding Author:** Mehmet Fatih Orhan , **e-posta / e-mail:** forhan@sakarya.edu.tr

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Abstract

Blood transfusion remains a life-saving intervention in modern medicine but carries significant risks, including transfusion-transmitted infections, immunological reactions, and circulatory overload. To enhance safety and efficacy, Good Patient Management Practices (GPMP) have been established in transfusion medicine. GPMP encompasses key principles such as appropriate indication, patient-centered assessment, rational blood component selection, pre- and post-transfusion monitoring, implementation of hemovigilance systems, and continuous clinician education. GPMP is closely aligned with the Patient Blood Management (PBM) model endorsed by the World Health Organization. The three core components of PBM—optimizing the patient's own blood, minimizing blood loss, and improving tolerance to anemia—are reinforced through GPMP practices. Evidence indicates that GPMP and PBM reduce unnecessary transfusions, lower complication rates, improve clinical outcomes, and enhance cost-effectiveness in healthcare systems. This comprehensive review discusses the fundamental principles of GPMP, its integration with PBM, current clinical applications, and its impact on patient safety in transfusion medicine.

Keywords Blood transfusion, patient safety, good patient management practices, patient blood management, hemovigilance

Öz

Kan transfüzyonu modern tıpta yaşam kurtarıcı bir uygulama olmakla birlikte, enfeksiyon geçişi, immünolojik reaksiyonlar ve dolaşım yüklenmesi gibi ciddi komplikasyon riskleri taşımaktadır. Bu nedenle, transfüzyon tıbbında güvenliği ve etkinliği artırmak için İyi Hasta Yönetim Uygulamaları (Good Patient Management Practices, GPMP) geliştirilmiştir. GPMP; doğru endikasyonun belirlenmesi, hasta merkezli değerlendirme, uygun kan bileşeni seçimi, transfüzyon öncesi ve sonrası izlem, hemovijilans sistemlerinin işletilmesi ve sürekli klinisyen eğitimi gibi temel prensipleri içerir. GPMP, Dünya Sağlık Örgütü'nün önerdiği Hasta Kanı Yönetimi (Patient Blood Management, PBM) modeliyle yakından ilişkilidir. PBM'nin üç temel bileşeni olan hastanın kendi kanının optimize edilmesi, kan kaybının en aza indirilmesi ve anemiye toleransın artırılması, GPMP uygulamaları ile desteklenmektedir. Literatürde GPMP ve PBM uygulamalarının gereksiz transfüzyonları azalttığı, komplikasyon oranlarını düşürdüğü, klinik sonuçları iyileştirdiği ve sağlık sistemi maliyetlerini azalttığı gösterilmiştir. Bu derlemede, transfüzyon tıbbında GPMP'nin temel ilkeleri, PBM ile entegrasyonu, güncel klinik uygulamalar ve hasta güvenliği üzerine etkileri ele alınmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler *Kan transfüzyonu, hasta güvenliği, iyi hasta yönetim uygulamaları, hasta kan yönetimi, hemovijilans*

INTRODUCTION

Blood transfusion is a vital therapeutic intervention in modern medicine, widely utilized in surgery, trauma, hematology, oncology, and critical care. Each year, millions of transfusions are performed worldwide, significantly reducing morbidity and mortality in patients with severe anemia, hemorrhage, or hematologic disorders.[1] Despite its life-saving potential, transfusion is associated with both infectious and non-infectious risks, including transfusion-transmitted infections, transfusion-related acute lung injury (TRALI), transfusion-associated circulatory overload (TACO), alloimmunization, and iron overload.[2,3]

To mitigate these risks and ensure safe, effective, and evidence-based transfusion practices, the concept of Good Patient Management Practices (GPMP) has been introduced as part of modern transfusion medicine frameworks.[4] GPMP emphasizes individualized patient assessment, rational use of blood components, strict adherence to safety protocols, hemovigilance, and continuous clinician education.

Importantly, GPMP closely aligns with the Patient Blood Management (PBM) model, promoted by the World Health Organization (WHO) and other international organizations, which advocate for optimizing the patient's own blood, minimizing unnecessary transfusions, and enhancing outcomes through structured interventions.[5,6] The implementation of GPMP and PBM has been shown to reduce transfusion rates by 20–40% in various clinical settings while maintaining or improving patient outcomes.[6,7]

This review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the principles, applications, integration strategies, and outcomes of GPMP in transfusion medicine, with emphasis on practical clinical implementation.

CORE PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PATIENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN TRANSFUSION

Appropriate Indication and Decision-Making for Red Blood Cell Transfusion

One of the cornerstones of GPMP is ensuring transfusion is performed only when clearly indicated. Evidence-based transfusion thresholds should be applied according to current international guidelines. The 2023 AABB International Guidelines recommend restrictive red blood cell (RBC) transfusion strategies, typically reserving red blood cell (RBC) transfusion for patients with hemoglobin levels <7-8 g/dL in stable, non-bleeding adults, while considering higher thresholds (8-10 g/dL) for patients with acute coronary syndrome, symptomatic anemia, or hemodynamic instability.[7,8]

For pediatric populations, age-specific transfusion thresholds based on the 2023 AABB guidelines include:

- Critically ill children: transfusion threshold of 7 g/dL
- Hemodynamically stable non-bleeding children: restrictive strategies similar to adults
- Children with cyanotic heart disease or severe hypoxemia: individualized thresholds

For neonatal populations:

- Premature infants: thresholds vary by gestational age and clinical condition (typically 7-12 g/dL depending on respiratory support needs)
- Term neonates: restrictive thresholds of 7-8 g/dL for stable infants.[9]

Unnecessary or prophylactic transfusions should be strictly avoided, as they expose patients to risks without clinical benefit.[10] Restrictive transfusion strategies have been associated with reduced mortality, decreased hospital length of stay, and fewer adverse events compared to liberal approaches in most clinical scenarios.[7,11]

Patient-Centered Assessment

GPMP requires individualized evaluation of each patient's clinical status, comorbidities, and physiological tolerance to anemia rather than relying solely on hemoglobin values. Pediatric, obstetric, geriatric, and critically ill patients may require different thresholds and considerations. Clinical symptoms such as dyspnea, tachycardia, chest pain, altered mental status, or hemodynamic instability should guide transfusion decisions alongside laboratory parameters.[12]

Special populations require tailored approaches. For instance, patients with chronic anemia often develop compensatory mechanisms that allow them to tolerate lower hemoglobin levels, whereas acute anemia is less well-tolerated. Cardiovascular reserve, ongoing bleeding, and anticipated surgical blood loss must all be considered in the decision-making process.

Alternatives to Transfusion

Before considering a transfusion, alternative therapies should be evaluated. These include oral or intravenous iron supplementation for iron deficiency anemia (with intravenous iron preferred in cases of functional iron deficiency or gastrointestinal intolerance), erythropoiesis-stimulating agents (ESAs) in selected populations (e.g., chronic kidney disease, cancer-related anemia), antifibrinolytic drugs (e.g., tranexamic acid) for bleeding control, and blood conservation techniques such as intraoperative cell salvage, acute normovolemic hemodilution, and restrictive phlebotomy practices.[13,14]

Absolute contraindications for tranexamic acid include:

- Active thromboembolic disease (e.g., deep vein thrombosis, pulmonary embolism, acute coronary syndrome)
- History of seizures or conditions predisposed to seizures
- Severe renal impairment (due to risk of drug accumulation)
- Hypersensitivity to tranexamic acid or any component of the formulation
- Subarachnoid hemorrhage (due to increased risk of cerebral edema and is chemia).[15]

Such approaches reduce exposure to allogeneic blood and improve patient outcomes. Meta-analyses have demonstrated that tranexamic acid reduces blood transfusion requirements by approximately 30% in surgical patients without increasing the risk of thromboembolic complications.[13]

Rational Blood Component Use

GPMP emphasizes the selection of the appropriate blood product based on specific clinical indications. RBCs are indicated for increasing oxygen-carrying capacity in anemia, platelets for thrombocytopenia with active bleeding or high bleeding risk. However, specific clinical conditions must be considered:

Platelet transfusion thresholds:

- Typically, <10,000/μL prophylactically in stable patients with hypoproliferative thrombocytopenia
- <50,000/μL perioperatively or for invasive procedures
- <100,000/μL for neurosurgical procedures or in patients with intracranial hemorrhage

Important considerations:

- Immune thrombocytopenia (ITP): Platelet transfusion is generally not indicated unless there is life-threatening bleeding, as transfused platelets are rapidly destroyed. Treatment focuses on immunosuppression.
- Pseudothrombocytopenia: Must be excluded by examining a peripheral blood smear or using alternative anticoagulants (e.g., citrate instead of EDTA). Platelet transfusion is not indicated in these cases as the platelet count is artificially low due to in vitro platelet clumping.[16]

Fresh frozen plasma for coagulopathy with documented

factor deficiencies and active bleeding (not for volume expansion), and cryoprecipitate for fibrinogen deficiency (fibrinogen <100 mg/dL with bleeding).

Single-unit RBC transfusion followed by clinical reassessment is preferred over routine multi-unit orders. Whole blood should generally be avoided except in massive hemorrhage protocols or resource-limited settings where component therapy is unavailable.[17,18]

Safety and Verification

A critical component of GPMP is ensuring transfusion safety through strict identity verification and compatibility testing. The "right patient, right product, right dose, right time" principle must be applied at the bedside to prevent catastrophic errors.[19] This includes two-person verification at multiple checkpoints, bedside identity confirmation using at least two unique patient identifiers, and documentation of all verification steps. ABO-incompatible transfusion remains one of the most serious, yet preventable, adverse events, typically resulting from identification errors. The implementation of barcode scanning systems and electronic crossmatch procedures has been shown to reduce identification errors by up to 85% in certain institutions.[20]

Monitoring and Post-Transfusion Care

Patients must be closely monitored before, during, and after transfusion. Vital signs (blood pressure, heart rate, respiratory rate, temperature, oxygen saturation) should be recorded at baseline, within 15 minutes of initiation, every 30-60 minutes during the procedure, and at completion. The first 15 minutes are most critical for detecting acute hemolytic reactions.[21]

Transfusion duration and product-specific considerations:

- Red blood cells: Each unit should be transfused over 2-4 hours, not exceeding 4 hours due to bacterial growth risk
- Platelets: Typically infused over 30-60 minutes; can be given more rapidly if clinically indicated
- Fresh frozen plasma: Usually infused over 30-60 minutes; may require faster infusion in massive hemorrhage
- Cryoprecipitate: Infused as rapidly as tolerated, typically over 10-15 minutes.[22]

Common transfusion complications include:

- Acute hemolytic reactions: Usually due to ABO incompatibility; presents with fever, chills, back pain, hemoglobinuria, hypotension, and disseminated intravascular coagulation
- Febrile non-hemolytic reactions (FNHTR): Occur in 1-3% of transfusions; characterized by temperature rise ≥1°C during or shortly after transfusion
- Allergic reactions: Range from mild urticaria (1-3%) to severe anaphylaxis (<1 in 50,000); caused by recipient antibodies to donor plasma proteins
- Transfusion-related acute lung injury (TRALI): Occurs in 1 in 5,000-10,000 transfusions; characterized by acute respiratory distress, bilateral pulmonary infiltrates, and hypoxemia within 6 hours of transfusion
- Transfusion-associated circulatory overload (TACO): Occurs in 1-8% of transfusions, higher in elderly and cardiac patients; presents with dyspnea, hypertension, pulmonary edema, and elevated BNP
- Delayed hemolytic reactions: Occur 3-10 days post-transfusion due to anamnestic antibody responses
- Transfusion-related immunomodulation (TRIM): May increase risk of postoperative infections and cancer recurrence.[22]

Prompt recognition and management of adverse transfusion reactions is essential to minimize morbidity. Common reactions include febrile non-hemolytic reactions (1-3% of transfusions), allergic reactions (1-3%), and less common but serious complications, such as TRALI (1 in 5,000-10,000 transfusions) and TACO (1-8% of transfusions, with a higher incidence in elderly and cardiac patients).[2,21]

Healthcare providers must be trained to recognize early signs and initiate appropriate management protocols immediately. A comprehensive overview of common transfusion complications, including their incidence, timing, clinical features, and management approaches, is presented in Table 1.

Table1. CommonTransfusion Complications

Complication	Incidence	Timing	Clinical Features	Management
Acute Hemolytic reaction	1:38,000–70,000	Minutes to hours	Fever, chills, back pain, hemoglobinuria, DIC, hypotension	Stop transfusion, IV fluids, supportive care
FNHTR	1–3%	During or within 4 h	Temperature rise ≥1°C, chills	Antipyretics, rule out hemolysis
Allergic Reaction	1–3%	During or within 4 h	Urticaria, pruritus, (rarely anaphylaxis)	Antihistamines, epinephrine if severe
TRALI	1:5,000–10,000	Within 6 h	Dyspnea, hypoxemia, bilateral infiltrates	Respiratory support; resolves in 48–96 h
TACO	1–8%	During or within 6 h	Dyspnea, hypertension, elevated BNP	Diuretics, oxygen, slow future transfusions
Delayed Hemolytic Reaction	1:2,500–11,000	3–10 days	Jaundice, anemia, fever	Usually self-limited; extended phenotyping
TRIM	Variable	Days to weeks	Increased infection risk, immune suppression	Use leukoreduced products

Hemovigilance and Quality Systems

National and institutional hemovigilance systems are central to GPMP. These involve systematic reporting, recording, and analysis of adverse transfusion events, near-miss incidents, and process deviations, coupled with feedback mechanisms for continuous quality improvement.[23] All adverse events, regardless of severity, should be documented and analyzed to identify system vulnerabilities and prevent recurrence.Hospital transfusion committees play a key role in audit, education, and protocol development.[24] Regular audits of transfusion practices, including appropriateness reviews and utilization patterns, help identify areas for improvement. Institutions should track key performance indicators such as transfusion rates, single-unit RBC utilization rates, and adverse event frequencies.

Education and Training

Finally, GPMP requires ongoing education and training of all healthcare professionals involved in transfusion, including physicians, nurses, laboratory personnel, and pharmacy staff. Standardized protocols, guideline dissemination, simulation training for transfusion reactions, and continuous competency assessment are necessary to maintain safe and effective transfusion practices. Educational interventions should include both initial training and regular refresher courses, with an emphasis on recognizing adverse events, proper administration techniques, and evidence-based indications. Studies have shown that educational programs combined with audit and feedback can reduce the incidence of inappropriate transfusions by 30-50%.

Table 2. Core Principles of Good Patient Management Practices in Transfusion Medicine

Step	Principle	Key Actions
1. Patient Assessment	Evaluate transfusion need	Detailed history & clinical examination; Assess comorbidities, bleeding risk, cardiovascular reserve; Review prior transfusion history and reactions; Consider patient's physiological tolerance to anemia
2. Laboratory Evaluation	Evidence-based indication	Hemoglobin/hematocrit, CBC; Vitamin B12/folate when indicated; Peripheral smear; Coagulation profile (PT, aPTT, fibrinogen); Apply restrictive vs. liberal thresholds; Iron studies, reticulocyte count
3. Decision-Making	Justification of transfusion	Use guidelines; Consider alternatives (iron, ESAs, antifibrinolytics); Document rationale and informed consent; Single-unit transfusion strategy
4. Preparation	Safety before transfusion	Confirm identity (two identifiers); Verify blood group & Rh; Cross-match; Check product expiration and integrity
5. Administration	Safe transfusion practice	Select correct component (RBC, platelets, plasma, cryo); Appropriate dose and rate; Standard blood filters (170–260 micron); Follow storage protocols
6. Monitoring	Early detection of complications	Record vitals (baseline, 15 min, hourly, post); Watch for reactions; Monitor for TRALI/TACO/hemolysis; Observe closely first 15 min
7. Post-Transfusion Care	Evaluate effectiveness	Post-transfusion labs when clinically indicated (low Hb rise, bleeding, reaction suspicion); Assess improvement; Document response
8. Hemovigilance & Reporting	Continuous quality improvement	Document all reactions and near misses; Report to hemovigilance systems; Root cause analysis; Use findings for audits and protocol updates
9. Patient-Centered Care	Shared decision-making	Inform patient about risks, benefits, alternatives; Obtain consent; Respect preferences; Involve patient in planning

INTEGRATION WITH PATIENT BLOOD MANAGEMENT (Pbm)

Patient Blood Management represents a paradigm shift from reactive transfusion to proactive optimization of the patient's own blood. The three pillars of PBM align seamlessly with GPMP principles (Figure 1).

Pillar 1: Optimizing Red Blood Cell Mass

This involves detecting and treating anemia preoperatively, managing iron deficiency with appropriate supplementation, and using ESAs when indicated. Studies show that preoperative anemia is an independent risk factor for increased transfusion, morbidity, and mortality.[12] A systematic review and meta-analysis by Munting et al. (2014) demonstrated that implementing preoperative anemia screening and treatment programs resulted in a 20-50% reduction in transfusion rates among elective surgical populations, with significant improvements in patient outcomes and reduced healthcare costs.[25]

Pillar 2: Minimizing Blood Loss

Strategies include meticulous surgical hemostasis, use of antifibrinolytic agents, point-of-care coagulation testing to guide targeted therapy, cell salvage techniques, and reduction of iatrogenic blood loss through restrictive phlebotomy practices. In critical care settings, minimizing diagnostic blood draws can prevent hospital-acquired anemia.

Pillar 3: Harnessing and Optimizing Tolerance to Anemia

This involves accepting lower hemoglobin thresholds when clinically appropriate, optimizing cardiac output and oxygenation, and managing the patient's physiological reserve. Recognition that most patients tolerate hemoglobin levels of 7-8 g/dL without adverse consequences has been a significant advance in transfusion medicine.

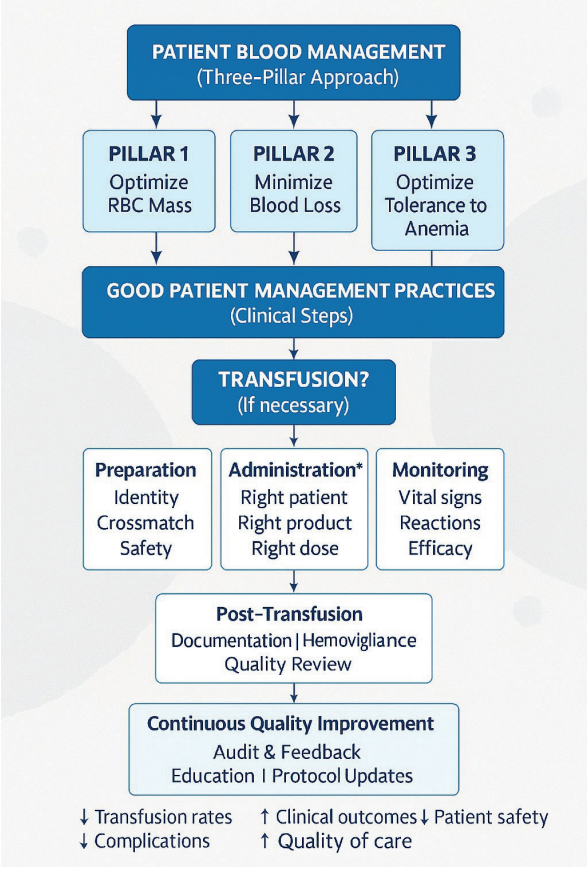

Figure 1. Integration of GPMP with Patient Blood Management

CLINICAL OUTCOMES and EVIDENCE

Multiple systematic reviews and meta-analyses have demonstrated the benefits of implementing GPMP and PBM strategies. A landmark meta-analysis of 140 studies involving over 200,000 patients demonstrated that PBM implementation was associated with a 43% reduction in RBC transfusions (RR 0.57, 95% CI 0.48-0.68), a 13% reduction in hospital length of stay, and a 34% reduction in acute kidney injury, without increasing mortality.[6] Institution-specific implementations have reported similar benefits, including decreased transfusion-related costs, reduced adverse events, and improved patient satisfaction. Healthcare systems that have adopted comprehensive PBM programs have achieved sustained reductions in blood utilization while maintaining or improving quality metrics.

BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION and SOLUTIONS

Despite strong evidence, several barriers hinder widespread GPMP adoption, particularly in resource-limited settings.

Barriers to Implementation

Clinical and Organizational:

- Lack of awareness among clinicians
- Institutional inertia and resistance to change
- Inadequate infrastructure for preoperative anemia management
- Limited access to alternatives (e.g., intravenous iron)
- Concerns about patient safety with restrictive strategies

Economic and Resource-Related:

- Reimbursement structures that do not incentivize blood conservation
- High upfront costs for infrastructure (e.g., cell salvage equipment, IV iron)
- Limited availability of blood products in low-resource settings
- Insufficient laboratory capacity for comprehensive pre-transfusion testing.[26]

Solutions and Strategies

For Well-Resourced Settings:

- Multidisciplinary PBM teams and champions
- Electronic decision-support systems integrated into ordering workflows
- Regular audit and feedback mechanisms
- Comprehensive education programs
- Institutional policies supporting evidence-based thresholds
- Quality metrics and reporting systems

For Resource-Limited Settings:

- Focus on low-cost interventions: restrictive transfusion protocols, reduction of phlebotomy volumes, educational programs

- Prioritize essential PBM elements: appropriate indication assessment, single-unit RBC transfusion, basic hemovigilance
- Leverage international partnerships and telemedicine for education and guideline dissemination
- Implement simplified transfusion algorithms adapted to local resources
- Emphasize blood donor recruitment and retention to ensure adequate supply.[26,27]

Cost-Effectiveness Considerations

Economic analyses demonstrate that PBM programs are cost-effective across diverse healthcare settings:

- Direct cost savings: Reduced blood product acquisition, storage, and testing costs
- Indirect cost savings: Fewer complications, shorter hospital stays, reduced ICU admissions
- Return on investment typically achieved within 1-2 years of program implementation
- Even in resource-limited settings, basic PBM interventions (restrictive strategies, education) provide net cost savings.[28,29]

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Emerging technologies and approaches hold promise for advancing GPMP:

- Precision transfusion medicine: Genomic and biomarker-based approaches to individualize transfusion decisions
- Artificial intelligence: Predictive algorithms for bleeding risk and transfusion requirements
- Point-of-care testing: Rapid hemoglobin and coagulation assessment to guide real-time decisions
- Novel blood products: Pathogen-reduced components, universal plasma, hemoglobin-based oxygen carriers
- Enhanced patient engagement: Mobile health technologies for shared decision-making and education
- Global harmonization: WHO initiatives to standardize PBM implementation across countries with varying resources. [27]

CONCLUSION

Summary of Core Findings

Good Patient Management Practices in transfusion medicine represent an evidence-based, patient-centered approach to blood transfusion that prioritizes safety, appropriateness, and optimal outcomes. Integration of GPMP with Patient Blood Management strategies provides a comprehensive framework for modern transfusion practice, emphasizing the principle that the patient's own blood is the best.

Clinical Practice Contributions to This Review

This review contributes to clinical practice by:

- Synthesizing current evidence: Integrating recent 2021-2024 data on GPMP and PBM effectiveness across diverse patient populations
- Providing practical guidance: Offering actionable protocols for implementation in both well-resourced and resource-limited settings
- Highlighting special populations: Addressing specific needs of pediatric, obstetric, and critically ill patients
- Emphasizing safety systems: Reinforcing the critical role of hemovigilance and quality improvement
- Demonstrating economic value: Presenting evidence of cost-effectiveness to support institutional adoption

Key Messages for Clinicians

- Transfusion is a therapeutic intervention with risks and benefits that must be carefully balanced
- Restrictive transfusion strategies (Hb threshold 7-8 g/dL) are safe and effective for most patient populations
- Patient Blood Management reduces transfusions, complications, and costs without compromising outcomes
- The "right patient, right product, right dose, right time" principle must guide all transfusion decisions
- Hemovigilance systems are essential for continuous quality improvement and patient safety

- Alternatives to transfusion (IV iron, tranexamic acid, cell salvage) should be considered first

Implementation Roadmap

Successful implementation requires:

- Multidisciplinary collaboration across surgery, anesthesia, hematology, nursing, and laboratory services
- Continuous education with regular training programs and competency assessment
- Robust quality systems including audit, feedback, and hemovigilance
- Institutional commitment to changing transfusion culture through leadership support and resource allocation
- Adaptation to local context with strategies appropriate for available resources

Future Priorities

While substantial progress has been made, challenges remain. Future efforts should focus on:

- Harmonizing international guidelines to facilitate global adoption
- Leveraging technology to support clinical decision-making through AI and decision-support systems
- Enhancing patient engagement in shared decision-making about transfusion
- Conducting research to refine transfusion thresholds for specific patient populations (e.g., traumatic brain injury, severe sepsis)
- Addressing equity to ensure PBM benefits reach resource-limited settings and underserved populations

By balancing evidence-based protocols with individualized patient care, GPMP offers a roadmap for the continuing evolution of transfusion medicine toward safer, more effective, and more sustainable practices.

Ethical Approval

Not applicable (Review article).

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Externally and internally peer-reviewed.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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