

4TH SEPTEMBER 2019: BERKSHIRE “BLOOD BIKES”

TALK BY CAPTAIN KAMRAN IRANI

Captain Kamran Irani gave an informative, inspirational and thought provoking talk about the Berkshire Blood Bikes.

In 1962 a family in South London were in desperate need of a blood transfusion for a member of their family but none was available and there was no means of getting the blood from north London because no transport was available. Someone volunteered to ride their motor bike to a north London hospital to collect some blood, which proved life saving. Mrs Margaret Ryerson, who was part of the desperate family involved in this incident, decided to start a charity that would provide cover from 7pm to 6am each day, when NHS hospitals lacked sufficient staff in their blood units, to take blood and blood products from one hospital to another as required.

Volunteer motor cyclists in this region, using 13 specialist bikes provided by Yamaha, Honda and BMW, and 3 specialist 4x4 vehicles, cover an area of 1700 square miles, linking 26 major hospitals. Each rider operates from home and is co-ordinated by a central control centre so that they can be tracked and linked up with other riders as and when necessary. In 2018 the Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Northamptonshire team answered over 2000 calls and saved the NHs several million pounds that would otherwise have been spent on taxi fares. Nationally there are 32 groups with 3000 volunteer members.

During the past few years another service has been provided - the human milk bank. In this region, based at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford, the neo-natal unit in the Children’s Hospital helps to co-ordinate the supply of mothers’ breast milk to where it is desperately needed. Mothers express any surplus milk, freeze it in small bottles that the blood bike drivers can collect and deliver it to wherever it is needed. Apparently this service has saved the lives of many premature babies. In 2018 alone there were 80,000 runs carrying these life saving packages, which cannot be transported in temperatures below 2 degrees or above 28 degrees centigrade. The Blood Bike drivers are often called “Angels in the Dark”.