London area there has been reported one death for every 13,000 bottles of blood transfused."—New York State Journal of Medicine, January 15, 1960.

Have the dangers since been eliminated so that transfusions are now safe? Frankly, each year hundreds of thousands have adverse reactions to blood, and many die. In view of the preceding comments, what may come to your mind are blood-borne diseases. Before examining this aspect, consider some risks that are less well-known.

BLOOD AND YOUR IMMUNITY

Early in the 20th century, scientists deepened man’s understanding of the marvelous complexity of blood. They learned that there are different blood types. Matching a donor’s blood and a patient’s blood is critical in transfusions. If someone with type A blood receives type B, he may have a severe hemolytic reaction. This can destroy many of his red cells and quickly kill him. While blood-typing and cross matching are now routine, errors do occur. Every year people die of hemolytic reactions.

The facts show that the issue of incompatibility goes far beyond the relatively few blood types that hospitals seek to match. Why? Well, in his article “Blood Transfusion: Uses, Abuses, and Hazards,” Dr. Douglas H. Posey, Jr., writes: “Nearly 30 years ago Sampson described blood transfusion as a relatively dangerous procedure...” [Since then] at least 400 additional red cell antigens have been identified and characterized. There is no doubt the number will continue to increase because the red cell membrane is enormously complex.”—Journal of the National Medical Association, July 1989.

Scientists are now studying the effect of transfused blood on the body’s defense, or immune, system. What might that mean for you or for a relative who needs surgery?

When doctors transplant a heart, a liver, or another organ, the recipient’s immune system may sense the foreign tissue and reject it. Yet, a transfusion is a tissue transplant. Even blood that has been “properly” cross matched can suppress the immune system. At a conference of pathologists, the point was made that hundreds of medical papers “have linked blood transfusions to immunologic responses.”—“Case Builds Against Transfusions,” Medical World News, December 11, 1989.

A prime task of your immune system is detecting and destroying malignant (cancer) cells. Could suppressed immunity lead to cancer and death? Note two reports.

The journal Cancer (February 15, 1987) gave the results of a study done in the Netherlands: “In the patients with colon cancer, a significant adverse effect of transfusion on long-term survival was seen. In this group there was a cumulative 5-year overall survival of 48% for the transfused and 74% for the nontransfused patients.” Physicians at the University of Southern California followed up on a hundred patients who underwent cancer surgery. “The recurrence rate for all cancers of the larynx was 14% for those who did not receive blood and 65% for those who did. For cancer of the oral cavity, pharynx, and nose, the rates were 5% for transfusions and 35% for those who did not receive them.”—Laryngology, May 1987.

What do such reports mean? They mean you may be the disease. Another primer: Bloodborne disease. Dr. bald patients receiving blood in the last quarter of 1982, 25 percent developed hepatitis. Dr. R. T. who received no blood did not. In a study of patients given no blood the year before, 17 percent did. Dr. John A. Salmon, in his report to the American Association of Blood Banks, who received donors at the end of 1982, wrote that the blood donor might not be able to withstand this thing worth while. But the donor will need to be informed of the risks.

DISEASE FREQUENCY

Blood-borne disease? Frankly, it can be ironic indeed. After all, it seems a bloodoste, a blood transfusion. But the risk of a disease? After discussing the disease, a few lines from cytomegalovirus (Common cold virus) were added.

The pope survived being shot. After leaving the hospital, he was taken back for two months, “suffering a great deal.” Why? A potentially fatal cytomegalovirus infection from the blood he received.