



To our anemia clinic patients:

You may have seen several recent news reports talking about the use of drugs to raise blood counts in kidney disease patients with anemia. Two large studies were published in the November 16th issue of the New England Journal of Medicine showing that when blood counts are raised to the 'normal' level, there is no added medical benefit, and there may be an increased risk of heart disease and stroke. But, if blood counts get too low, there is also an increased risk of heart disease as well as symptoms of fatigue (feeling tired), shortness of breath and cold intolerance (feeling cold all the time).

There are two ways of measuring blood counts: hematocrit and hemoglobin. Hematocrit has a normal level of between 41-53% in men and 36-46% in women. A hematocrit is a less reliable test which is why we use the hemoglobin.

The current guidelines of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) cite a target hemoglobin (blood count) of 10-12 g/dl. The normal level for hemoglobin is between 13.5 and 17.5 g/dl in men and 12-16 g/dl in women, but most people do not experience symptoms of anemia at levels slightly under the target blood count. We have been following the FDA guidelines for a long time, even before the release of the clinical studies.

We are in the process of ordering a 'Hemocue' monitor which can be used to test your hemoglobin level prior to getting your shot of aranesp. This will allow us to give you an amount of aranesp based on your current blood count. We will also be able to give you the results of your blood count before you leave the clinic. The test involves a small finger prick, instead of drawing blood from your arm. It is important to preserve the blood vessels in your arm because someday you may require hemodialysis and these vessels are very important to hemodialysis access. If you are anemic, this test should not affect your health because a finger prick will only take a small amount of blood.

We ask for your patience as we transition to this new method in our anemia clinic. Our intent is to provide our kidney disease patients with the best possible medical care and we feel the 'Hemocue' monitor will help us in reaching this goal. Please let me or one of the other doctors or nurses know if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Amy Mottl

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