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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### MEDICAL SCIENCES

1. *Kalynychenko T., Malygon O., Belousov A., Yahovdik M., Parubets L.* 8  
IRON METABOLISM INDICATORS IN BLOOD DONORS
2. *Plotnicu A., Maletskyi V., Steshyts M.* 13  
APPLICATION OF A COMBINATION OF INTEGRATED ACUPUNCTURE TECHNIQUE AND TARGETED BODYTHERAPY METHODS FOR DORSOPATHY
3. *Zagradska O. L., Horbunov A.* 20  
ANALYSIS OF THE REASONS WHY PATIENTS WITH REMOVABLE STRUCTURES VISIT ORTHOPEDIC DENTISTS

### CHEMICAL SCIENCES

4. *Sidikov Abdulaziz Abdumanop ugli, Togasharov A. S., Ibragimov A. B.* 25  
THE POLYTHERMAL SOLUBILITY OF THE SODIUM CHLORATE – MONOETHANOLAMMONIUM SULFATE – WATER SYSTEM

### TECHNICAL SCIENCES

5. *Makharoblidze Z., Margvelashvili V., Sharashenidze S., Partxaladze R., Shermazanashvili A.* 28  
ADAPTER BLOCK – MODULAR TRACTOR
6. *Podchashynskiy Yu. O., Chepiuk L. O., Voronova T. S., Shavurska L. Yo.* 31  
CONDITIONS FOR THE APPLICATION OF ULTRASONIC FLOW TRANSDUCERS IN THE GAS METERING INFORMATION SYSTEM
7. *Tsiutsiura M., Tsiutsiura S., Kryvoruchko O.* 37  
DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF TARGETED COMPETENCY-BASED DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION
8. *Нестеренко С. А., Наумов О. Д.* 43  
АНАЛІЗ КАНАЛІВ ПЕРЕДАЧІ ДАНИХ ПРОТОКОЛУ MODBUS У СИСТЕМАХ АСУТП
9. *Чайковський С. Ю.* 49  
КОРИГУВАННЯ ПЕРІОДУ КАЛІБРУВАННЯ ВІМІРЮВАЛЬНОГО ТА ВИПРОБУВАЛЬНОГО ОБЛАДНАННЯ АКРЕДИТОВАНИХ ЛАБОРАТОРІЙ

### PHYSICAL AND MATHEMATICAL SCIENCES

10. *Fedosov S., Sergeeva A.* 54  
SWITCHING OF POLARIZATION IN FERROELECTRIC POLYMERS
11. *Pysarenko A. M.* 59  
GUIDED LAMB WAVES IN COMPOSITE STRUCTURES

# MEDICAL SCIENCES

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## IRON METABOLISM INDICATORS IN BLOOD DONORS

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**Abstract.** The quality, safety, and proper use of donor blood resources are the most important aspects of transfusion medicine. One significant issue is the risk of developing iron deficiency in whole blood donors. This study examined iron metabolism and blood hemoglobin levels in a group of regular whole blood donors. It has been shown that some donors, after multiple blood donations, have serum ferritin levels as low as 15  $\mu\text{g/l}$ , which is below the threshold value (criterion) for blood donation eligibility. The results are important for considering the timing of medical examinations for regular donors, especially regarding the need for timely restoration of iron reserves.

**Key words:** whole blood donors, iron metabolism, donor examination, ferritin, iron deficiency.

**Introduction.** To prevent iron deficiency anemia and promote health among regular blood or red blood cell donors (apheresis), the ferritin level in serum or blood plasma is checked after every fourth consecutive donation [1]. In the presence of iron deficiency, the medical professional (transfusionist and general practitioner) of the blood system subject temporarily suspends the donor from donation and, if necessary, refers him for additional tests and consultations at healthcare facilities. At the same time, the hemoglobin level of donors is measured before each blood donation. According to the order of the Ministry of Health, donors are eligible to donate if their hemoglobin level meets the following criteria:  $\geq 125$  g/l for women or  $\geq 135$  g/l for men. It should be noted that donors with normal hemoglobin levels may already be iron deficient without overt anemia [2]. The choice of measuring ferritin after every fourth donation rather than at other intervals is arbitrary and not based on extensive research [3]. A regular donor who has been suspended due to the development of iron deficiency anemia is reinstated in donation based on the results of determining the hemoglobin concentration, as well as the ferritin content in blood serum (or plasma), following the above criteria.

**Aim.** To investigate iron metabolism indicators and hemoglobin concentration in regular donors, following the criteria for admission to whole blood donation, and from the point of view of the risk of developing iron deficiency.

**Materials and methods.** The study group consisted of regular whole blood donors ( $n = 24$ ), of whom 62.5% were women. One-third of these women were postmenopausal. The donors' blood was analyzed for iron metabolism and hemoglobin. Biochemical studies were carried out on serum from a vacuum tube without a filler. We utilized several photometric methods, specifically the determination of serum iron concentration and total iron-binding capacity (TIBC) measured in  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  [4], along with the cyanide method for measuring hemoglobin concentration in g/L [5]. Ferritin content was determined by enzyme-linked

immunosorbent assay ( $\mu\text{g/l}$ ) [6].

Statistical processing and data analysis were performed using STATISTICA 10 (StatSoft, USA).

**Results.** Iron metabolism indicators in the donor group were: ferritin -  $47.65 \pm 34.34 \mu\text{g/l}$  (Min -  $4.28 \mu\text{g/l}$ ; Max -  $128.35 \mu\text{g/l}$ ; normal value (NV) for women: pre-menopausal -  $8.4-156.9 \mu\text{g/l}$ ; post-menopausal -  $16.8-180.8 \mu\text{g/l}$ ; NV for men -  $21.7-276.4 \mu\text{g/l}$ ); serum iron -  $17.69 \pm 3.84 \mu\text{mol/l}$  (Min -  $11.3 \mu\text{mol/l}$ ; Max -  $27.0 \mu\text{mol/l}$ ; NV -  $9-29 \mu\text{mol/l}$ ); TIBC -  $69.14 \pm 3.63 \mu\text{mol/L}$  (Min -  $11.3 \mu\text{mol/l}$ ; Max -  $27.0 \mu\text{mol/l}$ ; NV -  $60.8-74.3 \mu\text{mol/l}$ ; NV for women -  $40-60 \mu\text{mol/l}$ ; NV for men -  $45-70 \mu\text{mol/l}$ ); transferrin -  $2.66 \pm 0.14 \text{ g/L}$  (Min -  $2.34 \text{ g/L}$ ; Max -  $2.86 \text{ g/L}$ ; NV -  $2-4 \text{ g/L}$ ); transferrin saturation -  $25.7 \pm 5.2\%$  (Min -  $16.7\%$ ; Max -  $36.3\%$ ; NV - average  $25\%$ ). Hemoglobin content was  $137.46 \pm 11.89 \text{ g/L}$  (Min -  $115 \text{ g/L}$ ; Max -  $160 \text{ g/L}$ ). 17% of donors had ferritin levels below the normal reference values; all of them were men. 25% of donors from the study group had ferritin levels below the threshold criterion of  $15 \mu\text{g/L}$ . All of these donors had low hemoglobin. In gender, they were women in the pre-menopause phase and men. 12 % of individuals had moderately low ferritin values for the whole blood donor category, namely between  $15 \mu\text{g/l}$  and  $30 \mu\text{g/l}$ . At such ferritin levels, hemoglobin content usually exceeds the threshold. This was confirmed in our study, where 100% of cases exceeded the threshold hemoglobin criteria for admission to blood donation. And this applied to both women and men. Unfortunately, according to scientific data, such regular donors who donate blood every few months have a high risk of developing iron deficiency with a fall ferritin level below  $15 \text{ ng/ml}$  [3]. Increasing the intervals between donations under ferritin control significantly improves hemoglobin and ferritin levels, which is ultimately a way to prevent iron deficiency [7].

Thus, iron deficiency without obvious anemia manifestations can develop in regular donors in conditions of individual lack of time to replenish these reserves. When maintaining only generally established norms of intervals between donations with measurement of only hemoglobin concentration as a marker of iron when admitted to blood donation, there is a significant risk of developing iron deficiency in

regular whole blood donors.

**Conclusions.** For preventing the development of significant iron deficiency in donors with previously detected moderately low iron levels (under ferritin levels not exceeding 30  $\mu\text{g/l}$ ), regular ferritin content testing of such individuals before each subsequent donation is fully necessary. This is one of the promising ways to solve this problem.

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