

Non-binary transgender San Diegan turned away from blood donation

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By: [Amanda Brandeis](#)

SAN DIEGO (KGTV) - A transgender San Diegan is calling for change when it comes to blood donation.

Currently, the FDA's recommendation to blood establishments is that in the context of the donor history questionnaire, male or female gender should be self-identified and self-reported for blood donation.

Van Levy of Pacific Beach is non-binary transgender, meaning Van does not identify as male or female. Van goes by gender-neutral pronouns like 'they', 'them', 'their', or just Van.

Van tells 10News when they reached out to the San Diego Blood Bank, they were told they would not be able to donate if they could not fully complete the donor history questionnaire, which has two gender-specific questions. Van was told if they cannot fill out 'male' or 'female' on the questionnaire they would not be able to donate blood.

"It was really hurtful and painful, it reminded me we haven't progressed as much as a lot of us like to believe we have, it just hurt," said Van.

The two gender-specific questions are, in the past 12 months, have you:

1. Male Donors: Had sexual contact with another male?
2. Female donors: Had sexual contact with a male who had sexual contact with another male in the past 12 months?

[This is wrong on so many levels. Van has a gender problem, not a sex problem. These questions are asking about biological sex, not gender. A trans woman is a male. So, if she had sex with another trans woman, they would be two males having sex. If two trans men had sex, they would be two females having sex. Why don't they simply ask if the donor is AIDS or HIV positive? Ed.]

Helen Bixenman is Vice President of Quality and Regulatory Affairs at the San Diego Blood Bank. She's in charge of making sure blood from the San Diego Blood Bank is safe and pure, free from transfusion-transmitted infections.

"It's important for people to understand we have a wide range of questions, and these questions pertain to the safety of the donor as well as the safety of the blood products. They include medications, how you're feeling, travel, risk behaviors," said Bixenman.

She says they must adhere to the strict regulations and requirements of the [FDA](#) and [AABB](#). She says if anyone fails to fill out the entire donor history questionnaire they will be turned away from donating blood.

Van wants to see this regulation changed and believes it marginalizes a group of people who only want to help their community.

"I definitely understand the rules and regulations that they have to adhere too and I think that there's ways to remove gender from the questions to get to same answers they're seeking to protect people receiving blood," said Van.

Bixenman says the San Diego Blood Bank does not want to turn people away from blood donation.

She says this is the first time they've encountered the situation and that she would consider bringing the issue up to advocacy groups and the FDA.