

19 December 2008

John Forsythe
Chair
SaBTO
Area 530
Wellington House
Department of Health
Waterloo Road
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Dear Mr Forsythe

Contact Details:

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Thank you for your letter of 8 December, responding to NAT's concerns over the life-long blood donation bans.

I am delighted this issue is to be specifically addressed by SaBTO at your meeting in July 2009. I was also pleased to see your concern both to maintain safety of the blood supply but also not to discriminate. You mention some areas of research which will inform your discussions next year. They are all interesting but important issues are also missing. For example, as I stated in my previous letter, we believe it imperative to assess the experience of other jurisdictions with similar HIV epidemics which have moved to a variety of time-limited bans.

It was good to hear the result of your enquiries as to the tests currently being used on donated blood, that it is now the fourth generation test which is consistently used. This was not what we had been told and it is interesting that SaBTO needed to survey UK blood services to find this out. This simply underlines the need for a comprehensive and proactive review of the life-long bans. SaBTO, NHS Blood and Transplant, and other defenders of the ban, still use arguments for risk based on the reliability of a test which is no longer in fact used.

You say in July 2009 you will ask for further research to be carried out if it is required. To know whether further research is required to assess the appropriateness of the life-long bans it is, in our view, necessary for SaBTO to carry out the 'proactive review' I called for in my letter of 12 November.

We believe it would be valuable for the many stakeholders with concerns to have an input into your deliberations next year. Perhaps the best way to achieve this would be for a seminar to be organised in advance of your meeting in July which can share thinking more widely on what we need to know and find out in order to assess risks to the blood supply and appropriate limitations on blood donation. Should, for example, NHS Blood and Transplant be interested in organising such a meeting we would be very happy to partner with them to help ensure appropriate participation and a useful day.

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I would be glad to know that SaBTO does intend to undertake a comprehensive and proactive review as proposed in my previous letter – even after your kind and helpful reply I remain unclear on this point. It would also be helpful to have confirmation that you support the proposal for a community and expert seminar to take place in advance of your July 2009 meeting which might assist you in identifying necessary research on the life-long bans.

One final point: we have received a considerable amount of public interest in our work in this area and we would like to post a copy of your letter of 8 December on our website. I would be grateful if you could confirm that you are happy for us to do this.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Jack
Chief Executive

cc: Dr Lorna Williamson, NHS Blood and Transplant
Henrietta Joy, NHS Blood and Transplant