

# SaBTO

Advisory Committee on the Safety  
of Blood, Tissues and Organs

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8 December 2008

Deborah Jack  
Chief Executive  
National Aids Trust  
New City Cloisters  
196 Old Street  
London EC1V 9FR

Dear Ms Jack

Thank you very much for your recent letter which represented a very reasoned approach stating your arguments clearly. You will know that SaBTO recently held a public meeting which was very successful in engaging with different organisations (on that occasion concerning the subject of vCJD). Therefore we welcome views from interest groups, charities and societies affected by decisions made within SaBTO.

The subject of Donor Exclusions is one which we wish to examine quite carefully. First because we would not wish to see discrimination against any individual wishing to make an altruistic act unless there was a good safety reason why exclusion should occur and secondly, because SaBTO is mindful of the need for sufficiency of blood supply. Therefore this subject is on our workplan for discussion at our July 2009 meeting, and all available evidence will be reviewed at that time. We are aware that other interested parties have taken part in discussions regarding this deferral in the past.

At our review of Donor Exclusions, we wish to take into account evidence which has been gathered by the Health Protection Agency and the UK blood services as follows. I believe that you may be aware of some of this work following discussions with NHSBT.

- Monitoring the frequency of infections that the blood service finds when it tests blood donations and collecting information about how people who have positive tests have become infected.
- Analysis of data collected by the UK blood services and by the HPA concerning the risk of blood infected with HIV being given to patients. The blood service tests all blood donations for HIV and the risk of transmission is currently very small however it is important to keep this risk at a minimal level. The next update of this analysis (previously published in 2003) is due in 2009.
- There is also a project at HPA underway to determine, if possible, which subsets of potential donors in the population are most likely to have sexually transmitted infections that might harm blood recipients. Again this project is due to report its findings in 2009.

- There are also some studies about the sexual behaviour of people who give blood and of how well people (especially MSM) comply with the exclusion rules employed by the UK blood services, and also what people feel about such rules.

SaBTO is keen to review all of this research at the time it examines the issue of Donor Exclusion. If we feel that further research is required then we will ask for this to be carried out and all of our deliberations will be available through our website which publishes both our minutes and the public summary of the minutes. Clearly any advice or recommendations by SaBTO will be subject to the appropriate legal scrutiny.

One important point; we have checked with all UK blood services and we can confirm that the test used for HIV is a fourth generation test for HIV detection, used alongside nucleic acid testing as standard for all blood donations.

Once again I would like to thank you for your letter and for your continued interest in this subject. I would reassure you once again that this is an important area of interest for SaBTO with ongoing work being carried out.

Yours sincerely

Mr John Forsythe  
SaBTO Chair