



CANADIAN BLOOD SERVICES VIEWPOINT

To the editor,

Thank you for your invitation to comment on the recent debate on paying donors for plasma donations in Canada. Your readers may be aware that in July of this year, the Province of Ontario introduced legislation to prohibit the payment of plasma donors. Canadian Blood Services recognizes the right of the Government of Ontario to proceed in this way, and values the government's role in preserving voluntary blood and plasma donation in that province. Given the complexity of this issue and the public debate surrounding it, we feel it important to clarify our organization's viewpoint. In short, we believe:

- » **This is an issue of public policy, not product or patient safety.**
- » **Pharmaceuticals made with plasma from paid donors are safe, lifesaving products for patients in Canada and around the world.**
- » **Canadian Blood Services remains committed to voluntary donation for its donors.**

Canadian Blood Services provides blood and blood products to all provinces and territories in Canada except Quebec. We manage a national voluntary blood donation system that provides a safe, affordable and accessible supply of blood, blood products and their alternatives to hospitals across the country. All blood components used for transfusion in Canada are donated by volunteer donors, and we are fully committed to a volunteer system for blood donation. The safety of blood components is assured through a rigorous and multi-tiered process that includes donor screening, transmissible disease testing, and product manipulation.

Canadian Blood Services also manages a national bulk purchase and distribution program for plasma protein products. The demand for many of these plasma products in Canada, as in other jurisdictions around the world, continues to increase. For many patients, plasma products are crucial, lifesaving therapies for which there are no alternatives.

To meet the growing need, Canadian Blood Services collects plasma exclusively from volunteer Canadian donors, and sends it to fractionation companies in the United States and Europe that make plasma products. The finished products are returned to Canada for distribution to hospitals. However, the plasma collected in Canada today provides sufficient starting material to meet only about 30 percent of overall patient needs. To meet the total demand, we also purchase plasma products from the international commercial plasma industry, which does pay its donors and has done so for decades.

This is neither new nor unique to Canada. As your readers know well, the majority of the world's supply of plasma products comes from paid donors. Significant improvements to fractionation processes since the 1980s have made plasma products remarkably safe. Manufacturers must meet the stringent quality and safety standards of regulators such as Health Canada and the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA). As a result, more than 25 years of clinical experience and numerous studies have shown plasma products derived from paid commercial sources are just as safe as products made from volunteer donors. Canadian Blood Services recognizes and accepts this important set of facts.

Canadian Blood Services is committed to a volunteer blood donation system and at the same time acknowledges the importance of paid plasma donations to meet international demand for critical drug therapies. Operating a safe system means not only meeting product quality and safety requirements, but also ensuring security of supply for patients. Thousands of patients depend on lifesaving plasma products, and without those produced using plasma from paid donors, the needs of these patients would not be met nationally or globally.

Sincerely,

Dr. Graham D. Sher, M.D., Ph.D., *Chief Executive Officer*