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The
Chairman
and Board
ME Alliance

By e mail –
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Our ref:2010/0011661OR

6 May 2010

Dear Sirs/Madams

Thank you for your e mail of 26 April 2010 to Nicola Sturgeon, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing regarding recent decisions by other countries to defer blood donation by those suffering from myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME/CFS) given the possibility of a link between this and gammaretrovirus- xenotropic murine leukaemia virus-related virus (XMRV). I have been asked to reply.

As you are likely aware, to achieve the highest level of safety, donor selection criteria is established and regularly reviewed by the UK's Advisory Committee on the Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs (SaBTO), using the most up to date risk estimates and data. Any changes are then implemented by UK Blood Services.

Also, in line with the UK Blood Service's current Donor Selection Guidelines, people suffering from ME/CFS are currently deferred from donating blood until they are fully recovered. This is primarily to avoid any adverse affect on their health.

At its most recent meeting on 27 April 2010, SaBTO discussed the claims of a suggested link between ME/CFS and XMRV, it being aware of the research papers to which your letter refers

and the recent decisions to defer blood donation by those suffering from ME/CFS in Canada, Australia and New Zealand. It was also aware of some papers which have not shown such an association. The Committee concluded that it would be premature to recommend, for example, a life-long exclusion at this stage. However, it undertook to keep the developing science under review.

Regarding your invitation to the ME/CFS International conference in May this year, I understand that Ms Sturgeon was previously invited to the conference and that a response to Ms Scobby (24 March 2010) advised that, unfortunately, due to prior commitments she was unable to accept an invitation to this event.

I hope this is helpful.

Wendy McKendrick
Team Leader, Blood policy