

ELLIOT COLBURN MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

14 June 2020

Our Ref: EC3606

Dear Matt,

Re: NHS Blood and Transplant Service

As you will know, today is World Blood Donor Day. It's a day when countries from around the world come together to raise awareness of the importance of blood donations to save lives, and to thank all those who voluntarily give their life-saving gifts of blood to those who are in need.

Promoting blood donation is even more acutely important given the advent of coronavirus, and the challenges presented by the risk areas and those people who have been in contact with or infected by COVID-19. Many people who would normally be giving blood are now unable to do so, threatening global stocks and supplies around the world.

Over 6,000 life-saving blood transfusions take place in the UK each and every day, however we have seen a 40 per cent drop in the number of people giving blood over the last decade. I am also aware that the NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) Service has highlighted the worrying gender imbalance in new donors, with men making up only 41 per cent of new donors in 2019. Now, more than ever, we need to ensure a safe and sufficient supply of blood.

There is a solution.

There are thousands and thousands of gay and bisexual men who would love to support the wider community by donating blood but, due to a current lack of research into this area, are restricted from doing so. As an LGBT+ rights advocate who is a Member of Parliament and a champion of the #FreedomToDonate campaign, I have a privileged position to be able to campaign for this to change, and to press for an individualised risk-based assessment model to replace the decades of stigma that has restricted, and previously prevented entirely, men who have sex with men from donating blood.

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Whilst the lifting of the lifetime ban, and then the subsequent introduction of the three-month deferral, was welcomed, there are many who feel that the current policy is still discriminatory towards gay and bisexual men. The default assumption by NHSBT is that heterosexual donors' sexual behaviour is less risky than that of men who have sex with men, and treats all gay and bisexual men as a homogeneous group. An individualised risk-based assessment, which assesses donor safety based on sexual behaviour rather than sexual preference, is the best way to ensure all those who want to donate and could do so safely can.

I know that the FAIR (For the Assessment of Individualised Risk) Steering Group is currently exploring whether some gay and bisexual men might be able to donate blood without a deferral, and that they hope to report their findings before the end of 2020.

Meanwhile, the appetite to donate exists.

Recently, we have seen many gay and bisexual men come forward to donate blood through NHSBT, as the three-month deferral period has been outlasted by lockdown. We've also seen the calls from these men to participate in the convalescent plasma clinical trial in order to help with the national effort against coronavirus.

On behalf of gay and bisexual men across the UK, on World Blood Donor Day and during Pride Month, I would be grateful if you could speak with NHSBT in order to bring about this change.

I look forward to hearing from you.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elliot Colburn', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Elliot Colburn

Conservative Member of Parliament for Carshalton and Wallington

Cc: Freedom To Donate