



Ein cyf/Our ref VG/04758/20

Janet Finch-Saunders MS
Chair, Petitions Committee

3 August 2020

Dear Janet,

Thank you for your email of 6 July concerning Petition P-05-995-Freedom to Donate Blood.

The Welsh Blood Service (WBS) is bound by strict rules with regard to blood donor and plasma eligibility based on the principle of keeping things safe for both donors and recipients' of blood and blood products. These rules are the same for all UK blood services and the WBS is unable to make independent rules that contradict national guidance as many of these rules are rooted in UK law within the Blood Safety and Quality Regulations, 2005, as is the case with MSM eligibility criteria.

The broad basis for deferring MSM who are sexually active from blood donation is based upon the fact that as a group they are known to have a higher risk of acquiring a blood borne infection such as HIV or Hepatitis B which then could be potentially transmitted through a blood transfusion. This increased risk also applies to other groups of people including sex workers, people who have partners known to be infected with transfusion transmissible infections like HIV or hepatitis B, people who have partners from parts of the world with a very high incidence of HIV/AIDS, people who have ever injected themselves with non-prescribed drugs and people who are currently taking Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) or Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP). Of course, each individual within these larger groups presents a different level of risk dependant on their specific circumstances. Currently the WBS is unable to adapt these rules for individuals and must adhere to the overarching guidelines.

The current UK donor selection guideline for all UK blood services states:

“You must not donate if you are a man who has had oral or anal sex with another man in the last three months, even if a condom or other protection is used.”

“You must not donate if you have taken Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) or Post-Exposure Prophylaxis in the previous three months”

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

These rules have evolved over time following several guidance reviews undertaken by The Advisory Committee on the Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs (SaBTO).

The most recent amendments are:

- Prior to 2011 there was a rule in place stating that a man who had sex with another man could never give blood
- In 2011 this permanent deferral was changed to a 12 month deferral period
- In 2017 the deferral period was further reduced to 3 months.

During the most recent SaBTO review undertaken in collaboration with patient group representatives and other interested parties such as the Terrence Higgins Trust, consideration was given to the MSM criteria.

The latest UK change in 2017 reducing the deferral to the 3 month period places the UK in a more advantageous position than some other services such as the Australian Red Cross who still apply a 12 month deferral period.

Although the 2017 deferral reduction was welcomed, it was recognised that further consideration to deferral is required and individual risks should be considered as opposed to group risk.

The UK blood services are working collaboratively with a range of stakeholders, including LGBT+ groups, as part of the FAIR (For the Assessment of Individualised Risk) steering group. The aim of the FAIR steering group is to explore if a more individualised risk assessment approach to blood donor selection policy is possible whilst ensuring the safe supply of blood to patients.

We want to give as many people as possible the opportunity to donate if they can do so safely and the Welsh Blood Service is taking a collaborative and evidence-based approach to assess this. It is hoped that the study will report their research findings to SaBTO towards the end of 2020.

Any changes to the MSM Guidelines will be announced at that time.

Yours sincerely,



Vaughan Gething AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services