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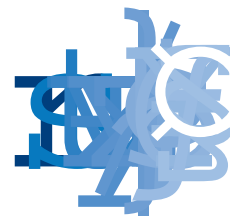
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Mr Fergus Cochrane
 Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee
 The Scottish Parliament
 TG.01
 Edinburgh
 EH99 1SP



6 January 2009

CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1135

Dear Mr Cochrane

I refer to the petition by Mr Rob McDowall calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review existing guidelines and risk assessment procedures to allow healthy gay and bisexual men to donate blood. After consideration of the initial responses to this petition on 4 November 2008, you have sought responses to two further questions:

If people who sell sex are excluded from giving blood, why are those who buy sex and therefore at risk of contracting a disease, allowed to donate blood after 12 months?

The Health Protection Agency (England) is currently working on the evidence base for exclusion of donors due to high risk sexual behaviours and this work is planned to be completed by 2010. To date, however, in the UK, the clients of people who sell sex have not featured prominently for blood-borne diseases when these donors have been traced and the risk factors identified.

Is there scope for a relaxation in the rules that might allow healthy gay and bisexual men to donate blood e.g. when they have a certificate from a health professional indicating?

There is no scope for relaxation in the rules as this would lead to a risk to the safety of blood transfusion recipients. The risk of HIV transmission is low but there is no guidance as to what level of increased risk would be acceptable to blood recipients. There is also the added difficulty of identifying “healthy” people of any sexual orientation which would be acceptable for blood donation purposes. This is because a HIV positive man may well consider himself to be healthy at the point of testing.

I hope this reply is helpful

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sylvia Mead". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S' and a long, sweeping tail.

PP Mark Dorrian
Policy Manager