



MEDIA RELEASE

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Nurses Unions Call on Health Canada to Reject Plans to Eliminate Registered Nurses from Blood Donor Screening

<<REGINA>> The lack of evidence to support the claims "that using unskilled, unregulated workers to screen blood donors **will not** jeopardize the safety of the Canadian blood supply" has prompted the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses (SUN) and other Canadian nurses' unions to address the issue head on.

Earlier this year, the Canadian Blood Services Inc. (CBS) proposed a pilot project that has Registered Nurses (RNs) being removed from the donor screening process; a critical part of the entire blood collection process. Since SUN and other Canadian nurses' unions learned of CBS' proposal and subsequent submission to Health Canada, the unions have been concerned about the safety of the blood supply with the planned changes.

"Registered Nurses (RNs) are trained in critical assessment, and have regulated professional standards and a code of ethics that prepares them for their vital role in the donor screening process," stated Marlene Brown, SUN First Vice President. "We strongly believe replacing RNs with unregulated employees, who do not possess the same knowledge and skills set as regulated health care professionals, puts the blood collection process at risk. We won't sit back and allow these changes to take place without voicing our concerns."

In a letter sent last week to federal health minister, Leona Aglukkaq, SUN and its fellow nurses' unions detailed their objections to CBS' proposal to eliminate Registered Nurses from direct donor screening.

"We know from the Justice Krever inquiry, the drive for cost-effectiveness and cost-efficiency can jeopardize blood safety. One of the most critical elements to ensuring a safe blood supply is the careful screening and assessment of all potential blood donors," says Brown. "The safety of the blood supply in Saskatchewan and Canada is our number one concern. You can't put a price tag on safety."

"The screening of potential donors has become even more expensive and intrusive," Justice Krever said in his 1997 report. "Careful screening is essential to maintain a safe blood supply and it must continue." Since the Krever Commission, following the tainted blood tragedy where more than 1,000 Canadians who received blood transfusions were infected with HIV and Hepatitis C, Canadian Blood Services has built their reputation as providers of safe blood.

The objections of nurses unions to the elimination of nurses from direct donor screening are based on research that found:

- registered nurses and/or physicians are typically used in donor screening, contrary to Canadian Blood Services claims;
- no evidence that the use of lesser skilled, unregulated workers would **not** jeopardize the blood supply or donor health; and
- research that indicates that employers can address retention and recruitment problems through improving the quality of the workplace.

“On behalf of 158,000 nurses, nurses unions have asked Health Canada to reject the Canadian Blood Services proposal to replace nurses with unregulated, lesser skilled workers”, says Linda Silas, RN, president of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions. “The proposal to replace nurses is a step in the wrong direction.”

-30 -

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