



MEDIA RELEASE

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Nurses question minister's decision to allow Canadian Blood Services to use unregulated workers to screen potential blood donors

<<Regina>>The Saskatchewan Union of Nurses (SUN) is joining the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU) in questioning a decision by the federal Health Minister, Leona Aglukkaq, to allow Canadian Blood Services' to conduct a pilot project to replace nurses with low-skilled workers for initial blood donor screening.

Nurses' unions across the country are calling for a transparent, independent and thorough evaluation of the questionable changes to blood donor screening.

The decision to allow low-skilled, unregulated workers to assess donor safety as a pilot project was communicated to Canadian Blood Services last Thursday before the long weekend.

The Krever Commission report on Canada's tainted blood scandal noted the important connection between blood safety and donor screening. The Commission said that "careful screening is essential to maintain a safe blood supply and it must continue."

"Nurses reviewed the proposal to Health Canada and see no evidence that drastically cutting nurses from donor screening is safe or necessary," says Rosalee Longmoore, SUN President. "Krever said the drive for cost-effectiveness and cost-efficiency can jeopardize blood safety, yet we see no other basis for CBS wanting this change."

CFNU commissioned external research on blood donor practices that found:

- CBS' proposed donation model is not aligned with international best practices. In most other OECD countries, nurses and/or doctors are routinely used to screen potential blood donors, contrary to CBS' claim they are not;
- there is no compelling evidence that the use of low-skilled, unregulated workers will ensure the safety of the blood supply or donor health; and
- CBS can address the issue of nurse retention and recruitment by improving the quality of their workplaces.

"Research shows that the elimination of nurses from direct care in other healthcare sectors causes greater rates of error and worsening health outcomes for patients," says Linda Silas, CFNU President. "The evaluation process on a matter of such public interest must be independent, transparent and participatory."

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