31 May 2012

Mr Edwin Poots MLA
Minister for Health Social Services and Public Safety
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast BT4 3SQ

Dear Edwin

I wish to thank you for your recent letter concerning blood safety and restrictions on donating blood.

The Irish Blood Transfusion Service (IBTS) remit is to provide a safe, reliable, robust blood service to the Irish health system. Blood, and the products derived from it, are an integral facet of healthcare delivery. A major objective of the organisation is to ensure that it always has the necessary programmes and procedures in place to protect both the donors of blood and recipients of blood and blood products.

The IBTS has a responsibility to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of safe blood to meet the needs of patients. In order to supply blood for transfusion all decisions on donation criteria are based on a review of the evidence bearing in mind the desire of individuals to donate, the safety of the recipient, and the tolerance of society in general of any transfusion related infection occurring. The exclusion of men who have or had sex with other men (MSM) from donation is based not only on risk factors for HIV but on other blood borne agents known to be associated with MSM behaviour.

For Ireland, the view of the IBTS is that taking all of these aspects into account, a permanent deferral for men with a history of MSM behaviour should remain in place. This and donor deferral policy in general will be kept under constant review.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Dr. James Reilly, T.D.
Minister for Health