



THE SCOTTISH OFFICE

Information Directorate

St. Andrew's House
Edinburgh EH1 1DG

Telephone 0131-244 1111

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IMPROVEMENTS TO BLOOD TRANSFUSION SERVICE
ANNOUNCED

The most significant modernisation of the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service (SNBTS) in its 50 year history was announced today by Scottish Health Minister Sam Galbraith.

The Minister also confirmed over £12 million extra next year to help the Service maintain first-class, responsive services to meet the increasing challenges of the NHS in Scotland, on top of the additional £800,000 already pledged over the next two years to improve donor services.

The key changes announced by Mr Galbraith are:

- improved clinical developments at all five blood transfusion centres in Scotland, including at those centres north of the Tay which will no longer carry out processing and testing functions;
- development of two national laboratories at Glasgow and Edinburgh - these will be equipped with the essential scientific skills, expertise and new technology needed to carry out new blood tests and processing technologies for the whole of Scotland;
- reorganisation of SNBTS' management structure to allow clinicians to concentrate on closer working with local hospitals;

News Release

- national co-ordination of blood stocks and donor sessions to ensure best use is made of the donor's gift.

Mr Galbraith said:

“Without donors there would be no blood transfusion service. Their gift is a priceless one. There can be no greater gift than that which saves lives. And as Health Minister, clinician and patient, I want to thank all donors for their continuing contribution. I want to urge all donors to keep donating. They are literally the lifeblood of the NHS.

“But we must also progress. These measures represent the first major restructuring of SNBTS in its fifty-year history. They will enable the organisation to maintain its worldwide reputation well into the next century.

“Blood transfusion is a field of rapid technological change and clinical developments. The measures announced today will ensure that Scotland stays at the forefront of increasingly sophisticated processing and testing practices. That means the Scottish public can be reassured that the blood and blood products we give patients will continue to be of the highest quality.

“As well as allowing SNBTS to meet these increasingly stringent safety and quality requirements, the changes will help ensure that we make best use of the donor's gift and better equip SNBTS to forge clinical developments in the field of Transfusion Medicine.

“I am especially pleased that a new regional transfusion centre is to be built at Gartnavel in Glasgow. Half of the country's blood is used in and around this area and now at last it is going to get the modern transfusion centre it deserves, organised according to the very latest in clinical best practice.

“I am also pleased to announce that SNBTS' remit has been formally extended to tissue and bone banking, so it can build on its current activity in this field to develop a comprehensive service for Scotland.”

Mr Galbraith confirmed that his agreement to SNBTS' proposals will be subject to some modifications and conditions so that all aspects of the Service would be safeguarded or enhanced as the changes are implemented. These will be monitored by the independent SNBTS User Group. The Minister added:

"I want to make clear the Government's commitment to maintaining and developing flourishing blood transfusion services north of the Tay. That is just what these proposals do. None of the northern centres are being run-down or closed. They will all be working with local trusts to develop clinical services. Local donor services will also be improved to make it easier to give blood. These developments will enhance their position as providers of a wide range of high quality blood transfusion services.

"I also want to emphasise our total commitment to SNBTS staff and to pay tribute to their continuing professionalism throughout the recent review period. I am clear that SNBTS' place as a world-class service rests on the well-being of its staff. I have therefore asked SNBTS to implement a comprehensive Human Resources strategy to make sure that all staff are properly valued in terms of training and development."

NOTES FOR NEWS EDITORS:

1. The Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service (SNBTS) is a division of the Common Services Agency of the NHS in Scotland. It collects, processes and supplies blood and blood products for direct patient care throughout the country, operating from five centres at Aberdeen, Carlisle, Dundee, Edinburgh and Inverness. SNBTS also provides a wide range of medical services and has its own R&D programme.
2. SNBTS is independent of the National Blood Service in England and the blood transfusion services operating in Wales and Northern Ireland.
3. Public consultation on SNBTS' strategic proposals began on 27 May 1998 and ended on 26 August 1998. The detailed proposals are contained in SNBTS' consultation document, which is obtainable from Miss Jane Pelly, Consultation Co-Ordinator, SNBTS Head Office, Ellen's Glen Road, Edinburgh, EH17 7QT.
4. The main proposals are:
 - a programme of clinical developments at all five blood transfusion centres in Scotland, including at those centres north of the Tay which will no longer carry out processing and testing functions;

- concentration of SNBTS' processing and testing functions on two sites - at Edinburgh and at a new centre to be built at Gartnavel in Glasgow (to replace the Carluke centre) - and closure of processing and testing at Aberdeen, Dundee and Inverness and slimming down of administrative functions throughout the Service. This will enable more rapid and efficient introduction of new safety measures such as leucodepletion (removal of white cells) and PCR testing for viral infections;
- reorganisation of SNBTS' management structure to allow clinicians to concentrate on closer working with local hospitals in delivering more effective clinical care via the use of blood and blood products;
- national management of blood stocks and donor sessions to ensure best use is made of the donor's gift;
- refocusing SNBTS' R&D programme to ensure that optimal benefit is gained from SNBTS' investment;

5. Despite a reduction in posts resulting from the concentration of processing and testing on fewer sites, all employees whose jobs are under threat will be offered alternative employment throughout the Service.

6. SNBTS' strategy also includes proposals for changes to its Research and Development programme. These are to be further considered by the Government, which will come to a decision in due course.

7. An extra £400,000 per year over the next two years for SNBTS' donor programme was announced on 23 September as part of the Government's Waiting List Initiative.

8. From next year SNBTS will receive over £12 million extra per year from the Government, for investment in new developments such as leucodepletion, sourcing of non-UK plasma, developments in donor services, improvements in platelet services etc.

Contact: John McCroskie: 0131 224 2951
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