

HEALTH

REORGANIZATION OF BLOOD SUPPLY SYSTEM— GOVERNMENT POSITION

(Response to question raised by Hon. Richard J. Doyle on June 20, 1995)

Last February the Government released the Interim Report of the Krever Commission — the Commission of Inquiry on the Blood System in Canada. It is very important to reiterate the main conclusion of that Interim Report. Justice Krever said that Canada's blood supply is not less safe than that of other developed nations. This is a very important message for Canadians to hear, and it bears repeating.

Justice Krever also urged all the participants in the national blood supply system not to be complacent. The Government feels this message should be heeded by all partners in the blood supply system. For its part, the Government has acted, and will continue to take action to strengthen the safety of the blood supply. The Government indicated as much when it released its Response to Justice Krever's Interim Report, which was tabled in the House of Commons by the Minister of Health on June 7/95.

Justice Krever himself said that his Interim Report was not a full examination of the blood system. He focussed on the current safety of Canada's blood supply, and he said that he was leaving an assessment of the national blood supply program and system for his final report. He also said that, at this time, it would be premature to expect full implementation of all the recommendations he makes in his Interim Report. General questions about the national blood supply system and ideas about its organization would best be served by referring to Justice Krever's advice in his final report, which is due to be submitted to the Government by December 31 of this year.

The blood system in Canada is multi-faceted. It includes the provinces and territories, hospitals and medical practitioners, the Canadian Blood Agency, the federal government, and others. Justice Krever recognized that the system today is dynamic and undergoing changes at a rapid rate.

The Government of Canada will continue to monitor these changes, which are occurring at all levels of the system. Where it is appropriate and within its jurisdiction, the Government will regulate and inspect all manufacturers of blood, blood products and components to ensure they are safe, efficacious and of the highest possible quality.

The Government has considerable scientific, technical and administrative expertise which it has brought to bear on those recommendations which are within the scope and mandate of the Government's jurisdictional authority. Where practical and warranted, the Government is prepared

to apply its expertise to assist others in implementing Justice Krever's recommendations relating to their jurisdictional authorities.

Very recently there have been claims made in the media that there may be "chronic blood shortages" in some of the country's hospitals and that public confidence in the safety of the blood supply needs to be regained. One of the best ways to rebuild public confidence is for all the partners in the national system to demonstrate their commitment to finding new ways to make the blood supply even safer. The Government has taken action and will continue to act to strengthen the safety of the blood supply. Others are acting in their own ways to rebuild public confidence. Indeed, Canadians should be reassured by Justice Krever's conclusion affirming the quality of the Canadian blood supply.

Justice Krever also emphasized that nothing he recommended in his Interim Report will diminish the urgent need for Canadians to donate blood. He recognized the enormous contributions made by Canada's blood donors by saying that all members of Canadian society owe blood donors a debt that can never be repaid.

One cannot but agree with Justice Krever, who said that by their past generosity, the blood donors of Canada have shown that they can be relied on to continue their selfless actions as long as blood is necessary for therapeutic purposes.

Turning to the question of the National Forum on Health and whether the subject of the national blood supply system is receiving specific attention from the Forum, it should be noted that the mandate of the Forum is to inform and involve Canadians and advise government on the ways to improve the health of the population. The Forum has been designed to promote a dialogue with Canadians about their health care system to determine whether changes can be made that lead to better health while respecting the principles on which our system was built. The Forum has begun to examine key issues under four main themes, and there may be some opportunity to discuss the national blood supply system under this thematic approach, but that is very much up to the Forum itself to determine.

CLOSER CONTROL ON TOBACCO PRODUCTS— GOVERNMENT POSITION

(Response to question raised by Hon. Mira Spivak on June 20, 1995)

The purpose of the Hazardous Products Act is to ensure the safety of personal, household, or recreational products by either prohibiting them or by regulating their sale, advertisement, and importation. Products are regulated under the Hazardous Products Act in order to make them safe. Currently, it is not possible to make tobacco safe.