

18 January 2009

Dr. Heather Hume and Dr. Susan Nahirniak

Re: comments on National Plan for the Management of Blood Component Shortages

The following comments are forwarded from senior executive members of the Canadian Blood and Marrow Transplant Group (CBMTG) and from the CBMTG representative to the National Liason Committee of Canadian Blood Services.

The CBMTG is in agreement with the principles used by the National Advisory Committee of Canadian Blood Services to establish a national plan and the CBMTG supports the main objective of Canadian Blood Services to maintain an adequate and safe supply of blood products for Canadians. Further, the CBMTG is willing to participate in developing solutions which lead to greater availability of safe blood products for Canadians to avoid periods of component shortage.

In the interim, the CBMTG supports the development of a plan to deal with shortages and it is important that the plan is synchronized with the patient needs and with the anticipated shortages. The CBMTG acknowledges that there is wide variation in the use of blood products with transplants and many transplants use a minimum of red cell and platelet products. Since transplants are planned procedures, we recognize that it may appear easier to defer these procedures in comparison to other indications that require blood product transfusion. We have some concern, however, with the phrase "deferring to the extent possible" during the red phase. Undoubtedly, this will pose a challenge that may be interpreted variably across the country. Awareness and discussion amongst transplant centers will assist with the development of a common understanding in the event transplants need to be deferred. A final concern is whether we should be warning our patients and families that the transplant may be influenced by issues related to product shortage and that their transplant may be delayed or transfusion practices altered during their transplant.

It would be helpful for the CBMTG to know how often we expect that the alert levels will be employed. If we anticipate that it will be never or almost never, then the approach is reasonable. If, however, we are frequently going to a red alert phase, the cancelling and then rescheduling of transplants will be a formidable challenge for transplant centers which already face marked reductions in resource allocation. The CBMTG would suggest that the criteria for deferral of transplants needs to be discussed in more detail.

The CBMTG is concerned that the red status may apply more frequently than expected and may be implemented during periods when it is most difficult to defer transplants, such as the summer and during holidays.

In summary, the CBMTG supports the document but remains committed to addressing the underlying causes of product shortage. Families and friends of patients undergoing transplantation could be motivated to donate if increased education was provided regarding the reliance on blood product usage for these patients and their vulnerability during times of shortage. The CBMTG plans to discuss the issue further internally and will keep the issue on the agenda of discussion for future meetings.

Respectfully on behalf of the CBMTG,

David Allan, MD.