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Dear Dr. Ison:

Thank you for your service and unwavering support to improve public health. I want to assure you that the recommendations from the June 2010 Advisory Committee on Blood Safety and Availability (ACBSA) have been instrumental in our Department-wide review of the blood donor deferral policy for men who have had sex with other men (MSM). While the ACBSA did not recommend a change in the current lifetime deferral of MSM, the Committee did provide several recommendations for careful consideration of high-risk behavior. As a result, I charged the Public Health Service Blood, Organ, and Tissue Safety (BOTS) Working Group (WG) on MSM to review the current policy on MSM blood donor deferral in the context of the June 2010 ACBSA recommendations.

We agree that quality data and analysis are needed to ensure appropriate decisions do not compromise patient safety. The BOTS WG was asked to identify both near- and long-term priorities for action and to propose steps, as well as studies, which would yield data for consideration in determining a change to the current deferral policy. The working group has since identified several priorities; however, in an environment of limited resources, each of our public health agencies is currently reviewing the most efficient approach to obtain appropriate data.

Please express my sincere appreciation to the entire Committee on the recommendations provided to the Secretary. These recommendations will help shape public health policy.

Sincerely yours,

Howard K. Koh, M.D., M.P.H.
Assistant Secretary for Health