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Presentation to the Canadian Blood Services Board of Directors

June 23rd, 2016 – Winnipeg, Manitoba

Dr. Sher, Ms. Hollins, and Canadian Blood Services Board Members, thank you for allowing us to present today at an important time for your organization.

Since 1979 Friends of Medicare have been advocating for an improved and expanded universal healthcare system in Alberta and nationally with our partners in the Canadian Health Coalition. Today Friends of Medicare wants to ensure that we are part of a timely discussion on the present day threats to the fundamental tenets of the Krever inquiry: that blood and plasma must remain a public resource, and that the role of the national blood collector should not be contracted off to anyone else. Our members across the province were very concerned when we learned that Canadian Plasma Resources (CPR) wants to open private pay-for-plasma clinics in Alberta.

Our advocacy work in Alberta is receiving growing political support and we were pleased to hear from Member of the Legislative Assembly and former Director of the Division of Clinical Hematology of the University of Alberta, Dr. Bob Turner who says: “As both a hematologist and a provincial politician I support the advocacy work of Friends of Medicare in moving towards a 100% voluntary plasma collection system.”

We believe that all blood components are meant to be a public resource regardless of what they are used for. We have a unique history with blood collection in this country and we have no reason to allow private plasma brokers such as Canadian Plasma Resources to have a role in introducing a parallel for-profit plasma collection system.

I’m sure you’re aware that in Alberta we currently have two plasma collection sites, Calgary and Edmonton, but both are only open to the public 4 days per week and at limited hours.

One percent of Alberta’s 2016 – 2017 provincial budget will be allocated to Human Tissue and Blood Services (\$199 million).¹ Out of that \$199 million – almost half (\$95 million) will be allocated to plasma products.²

¹ <http://www.health.alberta.ca/documents/Funding-Health-2016-17-Allocation.pdf>

² Telephone interview (June 16, 2016) with Glenna Laing – Director, Transfusion & Transplantation Unit Acute Care and Emergency Services – Alberta Health.

We understand that currently CPR will not be collecting plasma or blood for direct transfusion. We simply see this issue being about collecting the plasma required to manufacture pharmaceutical products. We all know that this has become an extremely profitable industry. CBS has maintained that our blood transfusion will remain voluntary. Dr. Sher has stated that CBS “does not pay donors for blood, plasma or any other kind of donation, and [they] are not going to.”³

It has been noted by the European Blood Alliance Report that the coexistence of two independent collection systems, one for blood and one for plasma, in the same region or country, could create a risk of shortage in the supply of blood components, “A stable and secure blood supply is also potentially affected by competition between the blood component sector (mainly non-profit blood establishments) and the plasma sector (mainly pharmaceutical companies). There is a risk that supply will be impacted, particularly with underprivileged donors attracted by a monetary incentive, and preferring to donate plasma for monetary reward rather than donating blood or blood components for preparing labile blood products (red cells, plate-lets, fresh frozen plasma).”⁴

While CPR's collection is currently small, with their expansion plans, they are potentially setting up a second independent collection system in competition with our preferred voluntary collection through CBS at a time when CBS is looking to expand voluntary collection. In a March 18th, 2016 Financial Post Story it was reported that “to follow through with its stated plan of selling products made from plasma collected in Canada CPR would have to compete through a Canadian Blood Services’ request for proposal process. In an emailed statement, Canadian Blood Services said it does not have an agreement with the company, but wouldn’t rule it out in the future. “If Canadian Blood Services determines in the future that purchasing more plasma is in the best interest of patients, we could consider products from Canadian Plasma Resources.”⁵

We were pleased to see a reversal of this position on May 5, 2016 in a press release CBS clearly articulated that they had no intention of using CPR, and intended to expand the voluntary plasma collection in Canada.⁶

While it is a very positive step it nevertheless begets the question of, why do companies such as CPR need to exist and who will they be selling their products to. By sanctioning, directly or indirectly, the creation of a parallel system we will be allowing the sale of Canadian blood for someone else's profit, with no benefit to the Canadian plasma collection system.

³ <https://opseudiablogue.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/sher-internal-blog-post-05022016.pdf>

⁴ http://www.europeanbloodalliance.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/eba_online.pdf

⁵ <http://www.financialpost.com/m/wp/news/blog.html?b=business.financialpost.com/entrepreneur/small-business/blood-money-legislated-out-of-ontario-canadian-plasma-resources-courts-controversy-with-saskatoon-clinic&pubdate=2016-03-19>

⁶ <https://www.blood.ca/en/media/canadian-blood-services-does-not-and-will-not-pay-donors>

In closing, our recommendations to CBS today are as follows:

- With the opening of a collection site in Saskatoon and possibly other provinces, we are creating unnecessary competition for our own voluntary plasma collection under CBS. CBS should join health advocates in calling for federal and provincial legislated bans on pay-for-plasma clinics in Canada.
- With no plasma clinics in BC, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, the Territories, or Toronto, over a third of Canadians do not have convenient means to donate plasma. Existing clinics have limited hours they are open. CBS should open more clinics and provide expanded operating hours to encourage more voluntary donations in Canada.
- Review and adopt other international best practices to attract voluntary donors such as covering travel expenses, notifying donors of when their donation has helped someone and any other option which can move us towards 100% voluntary plasma collection.

Thank you again for the chance to present today.