

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Students respond to "Sexual orientation prevents male student from giving blood"

Dear Editor,

FDA regulations about sexuality are "not ridiculous." They try to protect every one as much as possible.

Anyone can get HIV or STDs, but gay men and women are at most high risk.

If I was to need blood, I would not take it from a gay male! I would not accept blood for my children from a gay or lesbian.

I am sure that Red Cross only thinks about the best for everyone.

Isabel Dahmen

Dear Editor,

Due to the higher risk of certain behaviors on passing diseases, those who engage in such behaviors should not be allowed to donate. Even though the testing procedures have improved over the years, it's not perfect.

Many years ago, there was a scare over whether the available blood supply was contaminated or not. People have always had the choice to decide whether or not to engage in such behaviors, like choosing whether to visit Africa or not for the first time.

Jason Kerr

Dear Editor,

I am a student here at Clackamas. I have recently read your article on the Red Cross blood drive.

As a reader, I think the Red Cross does not have to change any of their regulations.

For example, this student Knudsen is mad about not being accepted. I think this student is not angry about the rules but at not being accepted.

To donate is to give, not to force. It is more as Red Cross is the customer and we the donors are the market. So I think Red Cross should not change a thing.

Bryan Young

Anyone is welcome to respond to any and all content published in *The Clackamas Print*.

Send letters by e-mail to chiefed@clackamas.edu or deliver them to Roger Rook Hall, room 135.

Letters may have been edited for clarity and space.

Dear Editor,

Dear Editor,

I am writing in response to the article about the gay man who was not able to donate blood at the blood drive he organized. Mitch Knudson was not able to donate blood because of his sexual orientation.

To be quite honest, I am pleased that our government would not allow this to happen. It shows a sort of consistency that is not found in a lot of aspects of politics in our country.

What I mean by this is simply that our country does not generally condone gay marriage and providing the same types of benefits as to regular married couples.

Seeing as though this has created such a heated debate within our country, if the government allowed these people certain privileges, but not other ones, then they would not be consistent at all, and that shows instability in our government.

What I am trying to get at is that if the idea of gay is going to be considered unethical and morally wrong in our nation, then it needs to be recognized as wrong in every way.

I personally would be worried if certain rules were being bent in order to make people feel better about themselves, even if what they are doing might be wrong.

Sarah Campbell

Sexual orientation prevents male student from giving blood

A FDA regulation about sexuality stops the Clackamas blood drive organizer, Mitch Knudsen, from donating.

Megan Koler
Editor in Chief

Many people who give blood regularly know that going through the American Red Cross screening process can be like jumping through hoops.

Some people who donated blood at last Wednesday's Associated Student Government blood drive were perhaps surprised to find out that they were not eligible to donate for a variety of reasons. Individuals who have recently visited a specific foreign country or taken a prescribed medication, for example, may be unable to give blood.

Others, like ASG Public Affairs Officer Mitch Knudsen, who organized the blood drive this term, are very aware that they cannot contribute simply because of their sexuality.

"I feel that it's inappropriate and ridiculous," Knudsen said. "Lesbians and heterosexuals can still get HIV and STDs. It's not just a gay STD, everyone can get it."

The blood donor eligibility guide for the American Red Cross states that the organization will not accept blood from any male who has had sex with another male after 1977. There is no mention of restrictions to individuals who have engaged in male-to-female intercourse or female-to-female intercourse, regardless of any precautions taken.

"It is ridiculous that these men can't donate," said English instructor Carol Burnell, who is the adviser for Clackamas' Gay

Straight Alliance. "Anyone that is having unprotected sex is susceptible."

"It perpetuates a stereotype that all gay men have HIV and that HIV is a gay man's problem," Burnell added. "These healthy, young men that get tested are constantly reminded that they are not accepted and they are thought of as diseased."

Knudsen considers himself a responsible individual and draws offense at the stereotypes that have developed over the years.

"People still think that gays are promiscuous and sleep around," Knudsen said. "I'm in a committed relationship. I don't sleep around. I don't do that."

According to Clare Mathias, spokesperson for the Pacific Northwest Regional Blood Services, the American Red Cross has been exploring the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

— which creates the guidelines by which the Red Cross decides — to loosen restrictions for blood donors for quite some time but to no avail.

"They check the blood. They check every unit of blood," Knudsen said. "They could save so many more lives if they let gay men donate."

The FDA's Web site has released an official statement in response to questions regarding the eligibility of men who have sex with other men (MSM) as blood donors. It reads as follows:

"FDA's primary responsibility is to enhance blood safety and protect blood recipients. Therefore, FDA would change its policy only if supported by scientific data showing that a change in policy would not present a significant and preventable risk to blood recipients. Scientific evidence has not yet been provided to FDA that shows that blood donated

by MSM, or a subgroup of these potential donors, is as safe as blood from currently accepted donors."

Mathias said. "They have planned to maintain those policies even though current blood-testing technologies have improved and will continue to maintain them until new information becomes available."

Although Knudsen succeeded in organizing yet another blood drive this school year, and will organize one again, the success is a complicated one.

"I'd like to give blood," he said. "I like coordinating it, and I am glad I am doing it because I like helping people, but at the same time, it just reminds me that I can't do this."



Student leadership adviser Michelle Baker waits patiently as she is prepped to give blood Wednesday, Jan. 30.

"They could save so many more lives if they let gay men donate."

Mitch Knudsen
ASG Public Affairs Officer

Dear Editor,

The recent article published on Wednesday, Feb. 6, has sparked more than its share of controversy.

I can see both points of view, and it boils down to discrimination and whether it is right. But I also implore you to look at both sides.

For instance, they will also not allow people who have gotten piercings or tattoos in the last six months to give blood, either. So are they discriminating against everyone who has had a tattoo or piercing? Are they considering them dirty people?

Now, back to saying all these people have this chemical or tainted blood is not true, but it is a precaution the FDA takes to ensure the most blood that can be used is taken.

I do not believe discrimination is OK or it should be tolerated, but sometimes a policy is set in place for the masses, not for the individual.

Zach Lenz

Dear Editor,

I am afraid to say I agree with the American Red Cross on the sexual orientation issue.

I would like to see everyone give blood, but unfortunately some have a higher risk than others.

This higher risk does not just include sexual orientation, but also people who take medications and have to pass tests to use them, and for people who leave the country in which there is higher risk of harmful diseases.

For example, I have been unable to give blood before because of a medication I was taking. I had to meet certain requirements to use this medication. Since the medication travels in blood, the person who receives my blood would also get this medication, too. The recipient of my blood could have an allergic reaction to the blood because of the medication that is in the blood.

The American Red Cross is going by standards to protect the recipients and donors.

Lastly, I would prefer to go by all precautions needed to protect myself if I was to receive blood from a donor.

Patti Degermess

Dear Editor,

I am writing in response to your article about gay men not being able to donate blood.

I've been well aware of this fact since I began donating blood over two years ago. I feel that donating blood is like giving a part of yourself to someone else. Your precious blood could, and probably will, save a life.

I have many gay friends, male and female, and they are appalled by this. My best friend is a gay male. He is incredibly responsible and always safe. In his 19 years of life, he's had one sexual partner. He has always wanted to donate blood but has never been allowed simply because he's had sex with another man.

Carol Burnell states that "anyone that is having unprotected sex is susceptible." I couldn't agree with this more. HIV/AIDS was called "the gay cancer" back in the '80s. Many people think that only gay men contract it. Many straight males and females have it, too, though. Upon stating that, I think it's ridiculous that healthy gay men can't donate blood.

Jenna Kendrick

Dear Editor,

Homosexuality should not be a factor when deciding eligibility for blood donation.

In our current times, promiscuity is standard for both homosexuals and heterosexuals. Perhaps the Red Cross should be cautious about blood from both sources.

In my day-to-day life, I am always overhearing conversations about people's personal sexual exploits.

"I started my period," one girl happily proclaims.

"Oh, I'm so happy for you," says another.

The very casualness of this conversation exemplifies that heterosexuals are engaging in risky behaviors.

Cory Adams

Dear Editor,

I have no first-hand experience with blood drives, reading the article, I am forming some opinions.

The first thought that my mind was, what is gay sexual relations? STDs more than straight relations?

This sparked my curiosity, and I will need to do research before I can understand it more.

After giving some thought to the matter, I figured if it restricts gays from giving blood, there must be a good reason. The FDA is around for a reason, and if they say no to gay men is detrimental to our health, I will believe them.

Tyler Smith

Dear Editor,

On the front page, a male's sexual orientation prevents him from giving blood. The American Red Cross policy reads, "Organization will not accept blood from any male who has had sex with another male after 1977."

This does sound like discrimination geared toward men, but that does not mean if scientific evidence is available, then their blood is safe.

I agree with the American Red Cross to maintain current policy until new information becomes available. It is better to be safe than sorry.

Ulga Demidorich