

**GREETINGS FROM THE HON. RUDYARD SPENCER**  
**MINISTER OF HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT**  
**LAUNCH OF SCOTIABANK GROUP'S ANNUAL BLOOD DRIVE**  
**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15, 2009 – 10:00 AM**

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I'm glad to be here this morning to share in the celebration of a promising new initiative to increase blood donation. I cannot express in words how grateful I am to the organizers of this event, Scotiabank Group. Your initiative is appropriately timed and properly focused and it signals Scotiabank's commitment to improve the country's health by impacting on the overall increase in the nation's blood supply.

This morning's launch brings new life by way of collecting new blood to support the National Blood Transfusion Service, otherwise known to all of us as the Blood Bank. It is no secret that the country faces a shortage of blood service. Annual collections average 25,000 pints. This is below the targeted amount of 50,000 – 80,000. The collections at most of our 10 centres across the island are far below the usage in those regions. This inevitably means that medical and surgical care could be affected. In 2007 alone, preliminary figures indicate that over 770 thousand trauma patients were seen at the island's health facilities. This further amplifies the importance of such partnerships as we are seeing today with Scotiabank to help to shore up our blood supply.

Scotiabank's inaugural outreach thrust to collect blood through voluntary donation is therefore welcomed and appreciated by the Ministry of Health. We have been struggling for years with the consistent shortage of blood and so the efforts of any organization that works in tandem with us to increase blood collection, is a much needed boost. Of the collected number of units, only 30% is voluntary. I anticipate that this blood drive will collect at least 1000 pints of blood through voluntary donations. Yes, I know this is an ambitious aim, but if successful, it would increase the present figure and bring us closer to achieving 100% voluntary donation.

The present condition that exists is that Jamaicans have a strong tradition of being '**replacement donors**', which means that they are likely to give blood for a relative or friend in need. Whilst this noble act is welcomed and appreciated, I must point out that it is not the safest way to collect blood compared to blood given voluntarily. Persons who are anxious to help a distressed family member often conceal important information about their health which may put the blood supply in jeopardy.

The issue of HIV / AIDS, increase in chronic lifestyle diseases, other conditions that are caused by viruses and parasites passing from one person to another through the blood such as malaria, threatens safe blood transfusion. The onus is therefore on blood donors to ensure that they are aware of their health status before donating blood and to also be responsible by supplying accurate information on their lifestyles when they go to give blood.

We make this plea to donors as we aim to uphold the status and distinguished feature of consistently providing safe blood, as highlighted in a PAHO report in 2002. Since the

National Blood Transfusion Service was first established on North Street on December 6, 1948, high standards of donor recruitment and retention have ensured a blood transfusion safety record comparable to the highest international standards.

A healthy lifestyle is one way of ensuring that the blood given is safe. Proper eating habits, regular exercise, adequate rest, safe sexual practices, refraining from smoking and the frequent consumption of alcoholic beverages are key components of a healthy lifestyle.

Another way we can protect the island's blood supply is by practicing safety on the roads. Accident victims often use a lot of blood in the fight to save their lives. Last year, this figure is unnecessarily high.

The Government alone cannot ensure safe and adequate blood supply. Therefore, any organization that seeks to forge a partnership with us to mobilize voluntary donation, is crucial. Again, I commend Scotiabank Group for this outreach initiative.

In closing, I want to challenge other companies to come on board as there is much more to be accomplished and through other initiatives such as this one, we can acquire even more blood supply to save lives.

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