

PMdeS/MJE

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The Editor  
The Economist Newspaper Ltd  
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Sir

We wish to point out that you are misinformed, both about the work done by the National Blood Transfusion Service in the UK, as well as current legislation in the USA.

First, plasmapheresis is carried out at most of the 14 Regional Transfusion Centres in England and Wales, and plasmapheresis programmes are rapidly expanding. At the North London Blood Transfusion Centre, Edgware, the first unpaid volunteers began donating by plasmapheresis in 1967. The number of regular attenders now exceeds 2500 and over 80% of these donors attend for donation once a fortnight. They receive no "reward" save the customary light refreshments and our thanks.

Secondly, we would defend the British volunteer donor system as one of the best in the world. Many countries are working hard to establish their own unpaid volunteer donor panels. In fact in the United States, it is now illegal to transfuse blood from a paid donor if blood from an unpaid volunteer is available. This clearly shows that donations from unpaid volunteers are considered to be preferable and, therefore, safer. The main reason that plasma collection in the United States is totally dependent on paid donors must surely be that very few people are willing to commit their time and effort for so little reward, in contrast to the altruistic motives of the British donor. There can be no doubt that a financial incentive may lead the potential plasma donor to conceal relevant details of past medical history or personal behaviour which make donation undesirable or unsafe for either donor or recipient.

Your comments about plasma collection in the UK were inaccurate and poorly researched - even down to the mis-spelling of plasmapheresis - and we would welcome a correction.

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