

15. Blood Pressure

State University's commitment to fostering an environment of mutual respect and tolerance, and recognizing and valuing the inherent worth and dignity of every person is articulated in its non-discrimination policy. The policy states:

The University prohibits and will not support discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, sex, age, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, or status as a disabled veteran or a veteran of the Vietnam War or Gulf Wars by university employees, faculty, students, residents, volunteers, agents, groups, and internal and external organizations that use University facilities. The University will not discriminate or tolerate discrimination in admissions, employment, or access to and treatment in University programs, activities, services, aids, or benefits. This policy specifically excludes, but only to the extent of the law, university relations with the federal government, the military, ROTC, and private employers.

The policy statement appears on all University publications, and each University-sponsored organization is required to sign a statement agreeing to abide by the school's non-discrimination policy. Now President Portia faces a dilemma that is dividing the University community as individuals and organizations that promote worthy causes appear to be in conflict.

Like many communities across the country, the town where State University is located is experiencing a blood shortage. In response to the crisis, the Student Nurses Honor Society, the Student Veterans Association, the Medical Technology Student Association, the Pathology Club, and the Red Cross are organizing a campus blood drive. Other students and faculty, however, are challenging President Portia to uphold the University's non-discrimination policy that prohibits activities on campus that arbitrarily discriminate against a particular class of individuals.

Five safety checks protect the country's blood supply: screening, testing, deferral registries, blood quarantine, and the manufacturing process. Currently, the safety of any donation can be assured after 11 days – safe from all but human error. Human errors in labeling and using blood before the 11-day testing and treatment processes are completed are responsible for almost all the tainted blood that is used. Despite opposition from local governments, educational institutions, civil rights groups, blood banks, the AMA, and most recently the Red Cross (who reversed its similar policy two years ago), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) permanently bans blood donations from men who have had even one male-on-male (MOM) sexual encounter since 1977. Every male donor is asked, "From 1977 to the present, have you had sexual contact with another male, even once?" If the answer is yes, the man is prohibited from donating blood – forever - and this information is stored permanently. The FDA is required to make recommendations based solely on scientific evidence, even to the extent of disregarding ethics and economics to present unbiased, hard scientific evidence. Although the FDA states that the zero tolerance policy for blood from MOM donors is not judgmental with regard to the donor's sexual orientation, it has failed to provide either scientific or ethical justification for permanently deferring MOM donors. Further, it does not impose the same

restrictions on either the female partners of MOM donors, who are deferred from donating blood for only 12 months, or on transgendered individuals (who are not acknowledged by the FDA).

President Portia discussed with city officials the possibility of holding the drive at city hall, but was informed that the city discontinued blood drives because the practice conflicted the with city's non-discrimination policy.