There has been an enormous, continuing expansion in our knowledge about viruses – particularly due to the availability of molecular methods allowing dissection of the basic molecular aspects of viral replication, virus maintenance within cells in acute, chronic and latent infection, and viral manipulation of the host cell. These scientific advances have allowed (albeit more slowly) improvements in our clinical understanding, and treatment of human viral illness.

There are new opportunities for assessment of the blood supply, including the availability of technical advances using pooling, antibody avidity, nucleic acid testing and improved quality assurance (addressed by Greg Maine and Ros Escott), opportunities for donor screening and treatment of blood (addressed by David Smith), and public health opportunities for national monitoring and administrative bodies such as the Australian Paediatric Surveillance Unit, the National Blood Authority, and the Therapeutic Goods Administration.

The papers presented are aimed at opening discussion about some important aspects of viral illness. Many others could have been included – just as virology impinges upon every aspect of human life. The papers represent opinions from a diverse group of scientists and clinicians around the country. There are many other distinguished scientists who work in these significant areas who could equally have contributed important opinions.

Again, from Peter Medawar; “Today the world changes so quickly that, in growing up, we take leave not just of youth but of the world we were young in”. The papers here represent a starting point for discussion, not definitive text, and I commend them to you for your consideration.