Theme: Blood represents life, and since ancient times the symbolism of blood has been embedded into language, ideology, mythology, and religious expression. Blood unites us and divides us. In the last century physicians and scientists have come to fully understand its therapeutic properties. Blood is a universal need that transcends boundaries of race and religion – a truly modern medicine.

Scope: This thematic exhibit covers the following areas: the symbolic history of blood; the acquisition of new knowledge of blood’s properties, which led to promulgation of blood remedies; the development of the field of transfusion medicine, in which scientific advances were often driven by the necessities of war; global efforts to maintain a safe blood supply through donor recruitment; the process of blood collection and preparation for distribution; and finally the many ways in which this vital medicine can save the lives of individuals with bleeding and blood disorders. Although the heart and circulation are discussed, the theme is developed with the main focus on blood itself.

Challenge: Blood is a modern medicine, meaning that philatelic material directly related to blood donation and transfusion is not available prior to 1940. This presented a challenge for early versions of this exhibit. However, examples of earlier material tied to the theme, including prephilatelic items, have now been added.

Knowledge: Thematic text and philatelic text are provided in distinct fonts. Translated text is provided where needed. Reflecting the universal relevance of blood to all countries and cultures, material from over 115 different postal administrations is included. A very wide range of philatelic elements is featured, including (among others) stamps and booklets, perfins, errors, slogan cancels, meter marks, postal stationery cards and envelopes, stampless/crash/disinfected covers, die proofs and colour trials, and original artwork. Thematic knowledge was aided by the exhibitor’s profession (hematologist) but also supplemented by extensive research into the history of blood symbolism and transfusion medicine, subjects not taught in medical school!

Look for the following philatelic metaphors: a perfin representing Galen’s (incorrect) anatomy of the heart, a missent cover illustrating confusion in blood group nomenclature, and a Penny Black with check letters representing the specific DNA alteration that caused hemophilia in the Royal Family.

Rarity: Items presenting difficulty of acquisition are indicated by a red blood drop ♦. Highlights include original artwork from Indonesia; pre-production items from Canada (a 1952 hardened die essay, die sunk on India mounted on card, only 1 example known), Tonga (including a cromalin proof, of which 4 exist), Burundi, France, and Monaco; stamped-to-order postal stationery cards from the Welsh Blood Transfusion Service, the National Blood Transfusion Service (Britain), and its predecessor the British Army Transfusion Service; a Canada small Queen with vampire bite error cancelled with rare 1892 Toronto Junction postmark, and a stethoscope watermark on Egyptian Syndicate of Medical Professions revenue stamps.

Condition: In this exhibit genuinely used covers and cards are featured where possible; these are often much harder to find than their mint counterparts or philatelically inspired items. In 1961 Romania issued a set of 6 postal stationery cards to promote blood donation, with a print run of only 56,000 – the complete set of cards in genuinely used condition is included in this exhibit.

Previous awards: 2014 CSDA Stamp Show (2 frames): Gold, Best Novice Award; ORAPEX 2015 (3 frames): Silver, AAPE Gold Award of Honor; Royal 2016 Royale (5 frames): Vermell, AAPE Award of Excellence – Plan and Headings, ATA Best Topical Award Second Place; CANPEX 2016 (5 frames): Gold, ATA Best Topical Award First Place. This exhibit has been revised with new items added since CANPEX.