

From the Rt Hon Dawn Primarolo MP
Minister of State

Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2NS

Tel: 020 7210
3000

PO00000219446

Mr **GRO-A**
The Manor House Group

GRO-A

Thank you for your letter of 29 June to Alan Johnson about the issue of patients infected with contaminated blood products following NHS treatment. Unfortunately due to the Secretary of State's busy schedule, he is unable to arrange a meeting with you at this time.

The Government understands that those who were infected with hepatitis C and HIV want to know how it happened and why it could not have been prevented. However, the Government of the day acted in good faith, relying on the information available at the time. We have been open and transparent on this issue, ensuring that as much relevant information is in the public domain as possible, with numerous documents having been released under the Freedom of Information Act.

As you are aware, there is a non-Governmental inquiry underway, which is chaired by Lord Archer of Sandwell. Department of Health officials met with members of the inquiry team on 25 April to discuss how the Department may assist. I can assure you that the Department of Health has not issued any advice to former Ministers or clinicians about giving evidence to the independent inquiry. This is entirely a matter for individuals.

In line with this policy of openness, and to address concerns raised following the return of documents previously considered missing from a firm of private solicitors, the Department is currently reviewing all documents in relation to non-A, non-B hepatitis between the period 1970-1985. A copy of the report has been sent to Lord Archer and placed in the library of the House.

The Review identifies just over 4,600 official documents that are available, including those released with the Review. It is not our intention to subject these documents to an independent legal review. We propose to release these documents in line with the Freedom of Information Act. I am sure you will appreciate that it will take some time to prepare this number of documents, and officials will release documents in batches at monthly intervals.

On the issue of a public inquiry into the issue of contaminated blood products, as previously stated, the Government does not accept that any wrongful practices were employed and does not consider that a public inquiry is justified. Donor screening for hepatitis C was introduced in the UK in 1991 and the development of this test marked a major advance in microbiological technology, which could not have been implemented before this time.

I hope this reply clarifies the Government's position on these matters.

DAWN PRIMAROLO