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Background note on the review of internal papers between 1973 and 1985

1. Lord Owen has publicly stated that the Department of Health had failed to honour the commitment he made in the 1970s to make the UK self-sufficient in clotting factors for haemophiliacs. However, the fact that self sufficiency was not achieved appears to have been linked to the massive increase in demand for clotting factors at the time not to any failure to implement Ministerial initiatives.
2. In 2002, Yvette Cooper originally agreed to an internal trawl of papers after lobbying initially by Lord Morris and later Michael Connarty, Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Haemophilia.
3. A DH official was asked to undertake a detailed review of the surviving papers between, roughly, 1973 and 1985 and put together a chronology of events. Without this it is difficult to answer any detailed accusations levelled against the Department by Lord Owen and others. The remit for the work was to review surviving documents from 1973 to 1985 to address a number of issues, chiefly:
 - how the Department implemented the policy of UK self sufficiency in blood products begun in 1973;
 - to chart the developing understanding of the seriousness of non A/non B hepatitis (later identified as hepatitis C);
 - to examine the extent to which problems at Bio Products Laboratory delayed the achievement of self sufficiency;
 - whether the achievement of self sufficiency would have led to fewer cases of hepatitis C in haemophilia patients.
4. It was not set up to address Lord Owen's comments, dating from the late 80s, that the papers from his period as a Minister had been "pulped". Unfortunately, none of the key submissions to Ministers about self sufficiency from the 70s/early 80s appear to have survived. A search of relevant surviving files from the time failed to find any. One explanation for this is that papers marked for public interest immunity during the discovery process on the HIV litigation have since been destroyed in a clear out. This would have happened at some time in the mid 90s.
5. A report was submitted to officials in the blood policy team in January 2003, however there were a number of outstanding issues which had to be resolved before the report could be finalised and submitted to Ministers. In 2004, officials commissioned consultants to analyse the papers and finalise the report.

Not to be disclosed

6. *Sandra – my understanding is that report concludes that the Department acted reasonably at the time in terms of known infectivity of blood.* A submission is in

preparation for PS(PH) on handling and making the results of the analysis of the papers public.

Line to take

I am aware that it has been some time since the review was first commissioned. Officials have therefore been asked to complete the report as quickly as possible. We will of course, let Mr Dolan know when the report has been completed.

27 January 2005