

Wednesday 23 October 2002

Written Answer

Monday 28 October 2002

PQ00413 2001/2002

Han Ref: Vol 391

Col 654W

BLOOD PRODUCTS

112 Brian Cotter (LD. Weston-Super-Mare):

To ask the Secretary of State for Health, if he will make available to the House the findings of his Department's inquiry relating to Lord Owen's period as a minister at the Department in relation to blood products used for transfusion. [76822]

MS BLEARS

I have now instigated a comprehensive review of papers from the period in question, which is estimated to be completed early in the new year. The findings from the review will be made available to the House.

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COTTER, BRIAN (LD WESTON-SUPER-MARE):

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SUGGESTED REPLY

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GRO-C: AAB

1. This is one of 3 related PQs from Brian Cotter MP on blood issues (and in particular, haemophilia). We do not know why he is asking these questions however he has taken an interest in these issues previously and was the originator of an EDM in 2001 supporting the Haemophilia Society's Carpet of Lilies campaign.

DH review

2. Yvette Cooper originally agreed to an internal trawl of papers after lobbying initially by Lord Morris (President of the Haemophilia Society and a tireless campaigner on haemophilia issues) and later Michael Connarty, Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Haemophilia. Lord Owen also re-entered the fray in an article in the Newcastle Journal last summer (the Journal often runs stories reflecting the viewpoint of Haemophilia Action UK). He has since been quoted on R4 The World Tonight & You and Yours. He was also due to attend a meeting alongside Lord Morris and Michael Connarty with PS(PH) on this issue in July this year but was unable to attend at the last minute.
3. We have now employed an official for a short period to undertake a detailed review of the surviving papers between, roughly, 1973 and 1985 and put together a chronology of events. Without this it will be difficult to answer any detailed accusations levelled against the Department by Lord Owen and others.

Self sufficiency in blood products

4. This refers to a statement made by Lord Owen when he was Minister of Health in 1975. Lord Owen made a commitment to make the UK self-sufficient in clotting factors within 18 months. He announced the allocation of special finance of up to £500,000, about half of which would be recurring, in order to increase the existing production of plasma derived clotting factor 8.
5. The money was linked to a target of 275,000 blood donations to be used annually for the preparation of Anti-Haemophilic Globulin concentrate and 100,000 donations for cryoprecipitate. This target was achieved within the 2 year timescale envisaged by Lord Owen and, as a direct result, the Bio Products Laboratory increased its production of concentrate from 5 million international units in 1976 to 11 million international units in 1977. However, given the rapid growth in demand for these products at the time, this was not enough to achieve self sufficiency.
6. Self-sufficiency continued to be the aim of Ministers for a number of years and NHS production of concentrate continued to increase. But the rapidly rising demand for clotting factors at that time necessitated the importation of commercial products as well to meet demand. Thus, failure to achieve self sufficiency was linked to the massive increase in demand for clotting factors at the time not to any failure to implement Ministerial initiatives.