

From the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
The Lord Warner



The Rt. Hon. The Lord Jenkins of Roding
The House of Lords
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Dear Patrick

I have been advised that you recently contacted Sir Nigel's office about my letter dated 27 January. I understand that you expressed concern about the Department's filing and record management systems.

I would firstly like to correct the impression I may have given that we hold no records on the treatment of haemophilia patients, blood safety and related issues. The Department of Health has a Departmental Records Office (DRO) that holds closed files on these areas. These files have been subject to a branch review.

Clearly, keeping good records is fundamental to the day to day running of the Department. We recognise that much of the work we do has long term consequences and accurate records are essential if future users are to be able to see why certain decisions were made, or why certain things did or did not happen. This is a message that is regularly communicated and reinforced to staff.

Mr [GRO-A] refers to what he calls a secret Westminster report. Officials have established that this refers to the document entitled "*Haemophilia Centre Directors' Hepatitis Working Party Report for year 1980-81*". A copy was attached to the letter I sent you. The paper indicates the existence of non-A and non-B hepatitis (NANBH), and that in the 1970's treatment with blood clotting factor concentrates carried a risk of infection with NANBH (what we now know as hepatitis C).

Unfortunately, in the 1970s and early 1980's, before effective viral inactivation procedures had been developed, many patients with haemophilia were inadvertently infected with hepatitis C from contaminated blood products.

The prevailing opinion among clinicians at the time was that NANBH caused a mild and often asymptomatic illness. The more serious consequences of hepatitis C, which may take 20-30 years to develop, only became apparent after full characterisation of the virus in 1989 and the development of tests for its recognition.

The paper does not show that anyone acted wrongly in the light of the facts and measures that were available to them at the time. I believe that Mr GRO-A has been campaigning for a public inquiry. However, as previously stated, the Government does not accept that any wrongful practices were employed at the time and does not consider that a public inquiry can be justified.

Mr GRO-A has requested copies of minutes from the National Blood Authority (NBA) and Haemophilia Centre Directors Hepatitis Working Party. I would like to suggest that Mr GRO-A contacts the NBA and United Kingdom Haemophilia Centre Directors Organisation directly. They are deemed to be the "holders" of these minutes.

With regards to the reference to minutes of the NBTS. Officials have identified files on the Advisory Committee on the National Blood Transfusion Service which was established in 1980. The first meeting was held on 1 December 1980. It would be helpful if Mr GRO-A could confirm firstly if it is the papers for this Advisory Committee that he would like to see and secondly if he could be specific about the period and issues that he is interested in, before officials make an assessment on the release of documents. Mr GRO-A should contact William Connon who is based at Skipton House, 80 London Road, London SE1 6LH should he wish to pursue his enquiries.

Yours sincerely

GRO-C

NORMAN WARNER