

~~Confidential~~ Haemophilia File Gen
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1. Mr Harris
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From: Dr R J Moore
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Date: 20 October 1987

c.c. Mr Langsdon
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Use of Factor VIII by Haemophiliacs

I attach a detailed chronology prepared in collaboration with Dr Smithies showing how our knowledge of the link between AIDS and Factor VIII developed in the period 1982-1984. MS(H) may also wish to see the redraft of the reply to Frank Field which I have attached.

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20 October 1987

CHRONOLOGY LEADING TO ACCEPTANCE OF A LINK BETWEEN FACTOR VIII AND AIDS

1. The first report of 3 haemophiliacs with an opportunistic pneumonia (subsequently associated with AIDS) was published in July 1982. UK Haemophilia Centre Directors agreed to gather more information. By early 1983, the possibility that AIDS might be transmitted by an infective agent in blood and blood products was established as a plausible theory. On this basis, blood donors in high risk groups were asked not to give blood from August 1983.

2. Throughout 1983 the Government's public line in Private Office cases and Parliamentary replies was that there was no conclusive evidence that AIDS was transmitted by blood products. This statement was strictly true and in view of the very small number of UK cases was intended to reduce public anxiety. However it is clear from the files that the Department adopted a precautionary stance and assumed in its policy decisions that AIDS was transmitted by an infective agent. Records show close liaison with Haemophilia Centre Directors, the Haemophilia Society, MRC, WHO etc. Information was gathered and shared but little positive action could be taken (apart from excluding high risk donors) because of the lack of knowledge about the causative agent of the disease. Haemophilia Centre Directors encouraged their patients to continue to use Factor VIII because in their view the risk from bleeding episodes outweighed the risk from AIDS.

3. Not until April 1984 when the AIDS virus was isolated could it be said that conclusive evidence was available. However by then public interest had waned and not until December 1984 did a Departmental Press Release need to refer to the AIDS virus in Factor VIII thereby acknowledging the fact for the first time.

4. A detailed chronology of significant material sifted from the files is attached at Appendix A.

5. We will be examining all Parliamentary replies from 1984 to date to confirm they have been consistent with this chronology.

20th October 1987

R J MOORE

APPENDIX A

Detailed Chronology

1. Reports were first published in July 1982 that 3 haemophiliacs in the USA had contracted pneumocystis pneumonia later known to be an opportunistic infection associated with AIDS.
2. As a result of this the UK Haemophilia Centre Directors at their meeting on 13th September 1982 announced that they had asked Dr Craske of the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) and consultant virologist to the UK Haemophilia Centre Directors to keep in touch with developments because of the "remote possibility" of a connection between commercial Factor VIII and AIDS".
3. In December 1982 a further 4 cases were reported from the USA. An editorial in the same report suggested that an infective agent might be transmitted by exposure to blood products.
4. In the first quarter of 1983 the UK Haemophilia Society's own Bulletin carried an article by a Haemophilia Reference Centre Director saying that the link between AIDS and Haemophilia was only tenuous and that haemophiliacs should continue with their Factor VIII treatment as the benefits far outweighed the risks. At that time AIDS was very rare. There were no UK cases and less than 1 in 1500 haemophiliacs in the USA were known to have AIDS.
5. In April 1983, Dr Craske of the PHLS wrote to DHSS with details of the way in which he intended to collect data on haemophiliac AIDS patients in the UK. At that time there were no UK cases. Dr Craske referred to the possibility that Factor VIII might carry some infective agent.
6. In May 1983 in response to media stories on AIDS a brief was prepared for Prime Minister's Questions which was also seen by

Geoffrey Finsberg then PS(H). The line to take stated that there was no conclusive proof that AIDS has been transmitted by American blood products. However the background briefing explained that medical opinion tended to favour the theory that an infective agents such as a virus may be responsible.

7. In August 1983 blood donors in high risk groups were asked not to donate blood. This precaution was taken because it was considered likely that an infective agent might be responsible for AIDS in recipients of blood and blood products. Lord Glenarthur then PS(L) in a Lords reply on 14 July 1983 explained that this precaution was being taken even though conclusive evidence was lacking.

9. A similar line was taken by PS(L) in August 1983 when in reply to Clive Jenkins of ASTMS he stated that all practicable measures to reduce any possible risk to recipients of blood and blood products were being taken.

9. PS(L) met the Haemophilia Society on 8th September 1983. A follow-up letter from PS(L) to the Chairman of the Society explained the Government's action to achieve self-sufficiency in blood products in the UK and to obtain more information about the disease by research and the collection of data. It also refers to the exclusion of high risk donors in the USA in order to limit infection in American blood products and reassures the Society of the continuity of supply.

10. In October 1983, Dr Craske presented a report to Haemophilia Centre Directors which stated that the infective theory was still the one which fitted all the known facts about AIDS and that consideration must therefore be given to the possibility that Factor VIII from the USA might be contaminated.

11. In a written reply to a Parliamentary Question from Mrs Currie on 14 November 1983, Kenneth Clarke then MS(H) said there

was no conclusive evidence that AIDS was transmitted by blood products.

12. In April 1984 the isolation of the AIDS virus was reported and the virus was acknowledged as the infectious agent which would be transmitted by blood products.

13. We have no record of any public utterance from the Government which acknowledged the infectivity of Factor VIII until 20 December 1984. In a Press Release on that date the Chief Medical Officer refers to heat treatment as a method by which the AIDS virus in Factor VIII might be inactivated.

14. The chronology of heat treatment from October 1984 was given in a written parliamentary answer of 22 April 1987 to Frank Field by MS(H). (Copy attached).