

Robin Cook MP

I understand that you discussed with John Moore whether financial help could be given to those people who had become infected with HIV following a blood transfusion or receiving donated organs. As promised, we have given a great deal of sympathetic consideration to this suggestion and have looked in detail at several schemes whereby help might be provided.

However I must now tell you that after careful scrutiny of the proposals I am regretfully unable to make any special financial arrangements for this group. I understand that John Moore also held this view.

As you know, we were able to provide financial help to the Macfarlane Trust for haemophiliacs mainly because they were a tightly defined group whose family circumstances and medical history were clearly documented by the nature of their haemophilia itself. The task of identifying those with HIV infection, those in need and establishing their credentials is therefore relatively straightforward.

Unfortunately when one moves to the wider sphere of blood transfusion recipients the practical difficulties of ensuring a fair system become insuperable. One rapidly becomes trapped in inconsistency when trying to distinguish between those infected abroad and those in the UK; those infected whilst in employment overseas and those infected on holiday; those infected with HIV and those with other transfusion transmitted diseases. As one attempts to be fair in this narrow context, it becomes more difficult to avoid defining 'innocent' and 'guilty' victims which is of course anathema to our concept of medical and social need and care.

I appreciate your deep concern for those who now find their aspirations shattered by HIV infection and commend you for the way in which you have pursued their cause and helped in our deliberations. However I hope you will understand the careful thought we have given to the problem and accept what I am afraid must be a disappointing reply.

Kenneth Clarke.