

Labour peer calls for blood inquiry

By Louella Houldcroft
Investigative Reporter

A LABOUR peer has written to Tony Blair demanding an urgent investigation into the role played by the Department of Health over the importation of contaminated blood products.

In an exclusive interview with *The Journal* last month, Lord Owen – who was minister of health under Labour Prime Minister James Callaghan – accused past governments of “serious maladministration” for failing to protect haemophiliacs from infected treatments.

He revealed that a multi-million pound commitment to ensure patient safety was not fulfilled after he left the Department of Health.

Subsequently 4,500 haemophiliacs became infected with HIV and hepatitis C.

When he tried to find out why, the department refused to investigate.

Now Lord Morris of Manchester, president of the Haemophilia Society and former Minister for the Disabled, has written to the Prime Minister urging him to investigate Lord Owen's claims.

He said: “Lord Owen's disclosure that Parliament has been effectively misled is of extreme importance.

“His statements make it quite clear that responsibility rests with the department.

“What I want to know is will the Prime Minister ask his health secretary to review this issue in the light of Lord Owen's recent public statements in *The Journal*

about the commitment he made in 1975?”

Carol Grayson, spokesperson for Haemophilia Action UK based in Jesmond, Newcastle, last night welcomed Lord Morris's efforts.

Ms Grayson, whose partner Peter Longstaff is a haemophiliac infected with both HIV and hepatitis C, said: “I have written an enormous number of letters to Tony Blair down the years but have yet to receive a reply.

“It would mean a great deal to haemophiliacs to feel the Prime Minister was taking an interest in their plight and I sincerely hope we get a positive answer.”

During the 1970s and 80s, all blood products were imported from abroad, mainly America, where people are paid to donate blood, encouraging high-risk donors such as alcoholics and drug addicts.

Those infected with HIV were given a sympathy payment in 1991, but the Government still maintains the tragedy was “no-one's fault.”

It has consistently refused to hold a public inquiry or accept any responsibility.

A spokesman for the Department of Health said that while it regretted the degree of infection that haemophiliacs had suffered, at the time medical technology was insufficiently advanced to make blood products that were virus free.

“Compensation is only paid if the NHS or an individual within it is at fault,” he said.

Why an Inquiry is a must: Page 8

The Journal
Bad blood scandal

Players k



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Wave of delight: Sven Goran Eriksson.

North-East welcome for returning heroes

By Graeme Whitfield

ENGLAND'S history-making footballers were enjoying the calm of a four-star Northumberland hotel yesterday, after jetting in to a rapturous North-East welcome in the early hours.

