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Department of Health
and Social Security

**PRESS
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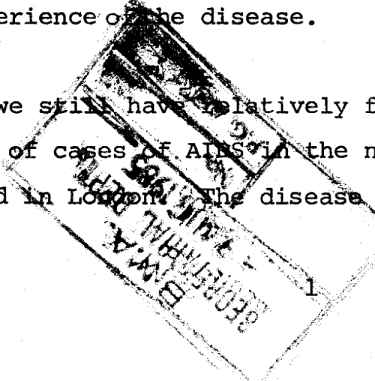
NHS TO DEVELOP AIDS COUNSELLING SERVICES

John Patten, Parliamentary Secretary of Health, today (Tuesday) announced that the Government has asked health authorities to draw up plans for a nationwide AIDS counselling service. The Government is also funding St Mary's Hospital, Paddington to set up a new training course for AIDS counsellors, the first of its kind in the UK.

Mr Patten said: "When the screening test for antibodies to the AIDS-related virus (HTLVIII) is introduced later this year we will need to provide counselling, help and support for all those whose blood is found to be positive. As a first step, Regional General Managers in all 14 health regions in England have been asked to nominate up to two people from each District Health Authority by the end of this month to attend a training course at St Mary's. In some Regions outside London, depending on demand, counselling may be provided at one or two centres rather than in each District for the time being.

"I am very conscious that there is public concern about this new disease. This is quite understandable and it is important that we take all possible steps to minimise the risks of exposure of the population to the disease. Having just returned from a visit to the United States where I discussed these issues with the US Government and many other people and organisations there who are involved in combating the spread of AIDS, I feel that we have much to learn from sharing our knowledge and experience of the disease.

"In Britain we still have relatively few infected people, and most of the increasing number of cases of AIDS in the next year or two are likely to continue to be concentrated in London. The disease is at present almost exclusively confined



to three groups of the population who are most at risk - homosexual men, intravenous drug abusers and haemophiliacs. Those most at risk are showing a recognition of the part they can play to control further spread. It is vital that their confidence is maintained and that the public shows an understanding of their problems. I hope that the counselling programme will help to achieve this."

Notes for Editors

The Government is providing £50,000 which will enable St Mary's Hospital to run training courses for AIDS counsellors over the next two years. The counsellors will provide help and advice for individuals who are found to have the AIDS antibodies present in their blood.

A copy of the letter sent to all Regional General Managers is attached.

The Department of Health and Social Security also announced on 1 August that the first stage of the evaluation of commercially available test kits to screen blood for HTLVIII antibody (the antibody to the AIDS related virus) has now been completed on behalf of DHSS by the Public Health Laboratory Service. Health Authorities are being informed of the result.

Three kits proved to be the most suitable for use in diagnostic laboratories. They were those produced by Organon Teknika Ltd, Ortho Diagnostic System Ltd, and Wellcome Diagnostics. Organon and Wellcome kits also appeared to be particularly suitable for use in Blood Transfusion Centres, and the performance of these kits is now being assessed in the National Blood Transfusion Service. Once this second stage of evaluation has been completed routine screening of all blood donations will be introduced.

Other kits may be assessed in the National Blood Transfusion Service in due course.