

DRAFT LETTER FROM MS(H) TO RHA CHAIRMEN

Dear Chairmen

ACQUIRED IMMUNE DEFICIENCY SYNDROME(AIDS)

I have no doubt that you share my concern that all practicable steps must be taken to combat the spread of AIDS in the community; it is potentially the most serious public health matter that has arisen in recent years. I am writing to ask you to make financial provision to implement the measures needed within the National Blood Transfusion Service, and to inform you of other developments which will have implications for your Districts.

Blood Transfusion

It is clear that one route whereby AIDS may spread more widely within the community is through the transfusion of blood and the use of blood products manufactured from blood donations. We have recently reprinted our leaflet "AIDS - IMPORTANT NEW ADVICE FOR BLOOD DONORS" and have asked that it be distributed individually to all blood donors (Health Circular (HC(85)3.) The next important step will be the introduction into the National Blood Transfusion Service of a screening test which can be used on all blood donations, as is presently done for hepatitis B and syphilis. Current screening tests for HTLV 3 antibody are still under development and will need evaluation. The Department is taking steps to co-ordinate evaluation work.

It is hoped that a reliable screening test, compatible with existing equipment, will be available within a few months. There is as yet no firm indication on what this will cost. As a broad indicator it would be prudent to assume for planning purposes a ^{maximum} cost of ~~around~~ £2. per test, which is the likely figure for tests being developed

Malcolm
What do you think of the
small amendments shown below
and overleaf? They're designed to
alleviate health authorities' anxieties
a little! (The cost in 85/86 will however
be less than that in a full
year).

GRO-C

29/11

commercially in the USA, ^{though we} ~~We~~ hope that a British test would be considerably cheaper. Although I know that there are many competing calls upon your resources, I must ask you as a matter of priority to ensure that sufficient funding is earmarked in 1985 - 86 for the ~~introduction of this test~~ ^{introduction of this test, ~~in the following year~~ ^{during that year}}. We need to be able to assure patients that treatment involving blood or blood products does not expose them to the risk of contracting AIDS.

Other Action

We have just issued Health Circular HS(85)1 which contains interim guidelines on AIDS, drawn up by the Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens. The Chief Medical Officer has convened an Expert Group to consider other issues, including the need for wider health service use of such an AIDS antibody test, and arrangements for patient counselling. Since these aspects will inevitably have resource implications, you may wish to forewarn your Districts of these likely developments.

KENNETH CLARKE