

To: SofS

From: Michael Clarke, COMMS

Cc: Jeff Tomlinson
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HEP C ANNOUNCEMENT PROPOSED MEDIA HANDLING

Background

You want to let it be known that you are minded to establish a compensation scheme for people infected with Hepatitis C as a result of being given contaminated blood products by the NHS.

Timing

The Scottish Executive is due to brief MSPs on its plans for a similar scheme on Friday, effectively confirming compensation is to go ahead. This can be expected to appear in Scottish papers on Saturday. You want the DH to make a simultaneous announcement so the news also appears in English papers on Saturday, sourced to the DH.

The Media Centre therefore needs to tell the English media on Friday, for use in Saturday's papers.

Issues

Announcement options

I recommend an off-the-record briefing to all national newspaper health correspondents plus the BBC on Friday for use on Saturday morning. This allows us to make the announcement without getting bogged down in the detail and OGD clearance required for a formal press release.

Health corrs are more likely to focus on the 'good news' of cash for victims. Political corrs may look at the cross-border political context and SofS' position as a Scottish MP running the English NHS.

An exclusive briefing to one or two papers risks the story being ignored in other papers. The Sundays will give it only a passing mention in any case as it will be 'old' by then.

DH Media Centre on Saturday would be given a reactive on-the-record line to take, briefly confirming plans for a scheme were under way and stating details have still to be worked out.

Proposed content:

'SofS has decided to establish a compensation scheme for people infected with Hepatitis C as a result of being given contaminated blood products by the NHS.

'John Reid looked at the papers after taking over as SofS and decided on compassionate grounds that this is an exceptional situation which deserves one-off treatment.

'He has therefore decided in principle that English Hep C sufferers should receive compensation payments from the Department of Health.

'The details of the payments have yet to be worked out.'

Q & A

It would be helpful if policy officials could provide answers to as many of the following. Often the answer may be that details have yet to be worked out.

1. Who will benefit from the scheme?
2. How much money will they get?
3. When will it be paid?
4. How much is the scheme expected to cost in England?
5. Where is that money coming from?
6. Will the scheme or a similar one apply in Northern Ireland and Wales?
7. If so, how much will it cost and where will the money come from?
8. Why is the announcement being made now?

Recommendations

1. That you approve plan to brief all national health correspondents on Friday for use in Saturday's papers.
2. That you approve the content of the briefing.
3. That you ask officials to draw up what answers they can to the questions set out above.