

BLOOD BLUNDER KILLED OVER 100 PATIANTS.

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By Antony Barnett, Public affairs Editor

More than 100 people have died from Hepatitis C following a national health Blunder, according to an American court. Thousands more were infected .

A U.S. professor as said a treatment of donated blood, which would have destroyed the hepatitis C virus and prevented deaths , could have been introduced in the seventies. so far 113 British Haemophiliacs whose blood lacks proteins that make it clot have died after receiving contaminated blood products as part of the NHS treatment. Nearly 5000 ? are infected with hepatitis C which can lead to chronic liver disease or cancer.

Lawyers and the Haemophilia Society will be pressing Health Secretary Alan Milburn for compensation.

Last year, his predecessor, Frank Dobson, refused to help and Tony Blair has declined to meet campaigners.

Alan Milburn is one of the 16 current ministers who in 1995 signed an early day motion calling for the government to give financial assistance to haemophiliacs infected with hepatitis C, as was being done for those infected with HIV.

Graham Ross, The lawyer who acted for those with HIV, has this week written to Alan Milburn asking that the two groups be treated equally.

His letter refers to the new evidence given by Frank Putnam, a U.S. professor in molecular biology, as " highly significant"

Putnam's work shows clearly that heat treatment of blood to kill of hepatitis was in the public domain even before blood clotting factors eight was developed for haemophiliacs in the UK.

Governments in Canada, Ireland and Italy have begun compensating haemophiliacs who have the same disease.

BAD BLOOD.

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In a fortnight time, Britain's haemophilia community will be taking 113 white lilies to the steps of ten Downing Street to remind the Prime Minister of the 113 haemophiliacs who have died from liver failure. Each one was infected by contaminated blood products they received through their NHS treatment designed to help their blood to clot.

Each one went to their grave without their families receiving any financial compensation

A further 4,800 ? haemophiliacs were infected with Hepatitis C and face an uncertain future of chronic liver disease or cancer. many live in hardship, having been forced to give up work.

Contrast this with the fate of the 1,200 haemophiliacs who were infected with HIV by exactly the same NHS contaminated blood products. After an acrimonious legal wrangle in 1990, the Tory government caved in and agreed an £80 million compensation fund to be disbursed by the Macfarlane Trust.

The cases of the two groups seem identical. Through NHS treatment, both became infected with potentially lethal diseases. Today, The Observer reveals new evidence that the tragedy could have been averted if donor blood had undergone a treatment in the Seventies which was known to kill the hepatitis virus. But to prove negligence would involve a lengthy legal battle which would do neither the Government nor the victims any good. Surely it is time for a government that promised that it's "commitment to the vulnerable is none negotiable" to act to end this injustice.

it is argued that to compensate them would take money away from patient care. But in the case of the HIV infection, help came from the government's contingency funds which is where funding should come from for those infected with Hepatitis C. The Observer backs the Haemophilia Society's campaign to extend the terms of the Macfarlane trust to include them.

From the Information that is now flooding in to our group from many sources, it is now clear to me that the government are not being truthful about this issue.

I Myself now accuse the government publicly of covering up the true facts about Hepatitis C and the HIV infections.

And I challenge them to meet and explain this and the reason they do not want a public enquiry.

I am accusing the British Government of lying to the British public and of keeping secret the goings on of the NHS, The Blood Products Laboratories and The Blood Services, with regards to these infections.

Why were so many people given contaminated blood products after clear warnings about the risks of infection?.

What were the political and financial decisions that condemned so many haemophiliac patients to early deaths.

Yours sincerely,

GRO-C