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**PO 1037390 – LORD OWEN**

1. MS(H) has asked for a full background note on the review of internal papers between 1973 and 1985 and comments by Lord Owen about the destruction of papers from his Private Office at the time.
2. Lord Owen has publicly stated that the Department of Health had failed to honour the commitment he made in the 1970s to make the UK self-sufficient in clotting factors for haemophiliacs. However, the fact that self sufficiency was not achieved appears to have been linked to the massive increase in demand for clotting factors at the time not to any failure to implement Ministerial initiatives.
3. In 2002, Yvette Cooper originally agreed to an internal trawl of papers after lobbying initially by Lord Morris and later Michael Connarty, Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Haemophilia.
4. A DH official was asked to undertake a detailed review of the surviving papers between, roughly, 1973 and 1985 and put together a chronology of events. Without this it is difficult to answer any detailed accusations levelled against the Department by Lord Owen and others. The remit for the work was to review surviving documents from 1973 to 1985 to address a number of issues, chiefly:
  - how the Department implemented the policy of UK self sufficiency in blood products begun in 1973;
  - to chart the developing understanding of the seriousness of non A/non B hepatitis (later identified as hepatitis C);
  - to examine the extent to which problems at Bio Products Laboratory delayed the achievement of self sufficiency;
  - whether the achievement of self sufficiency would have led to fewer cases of hepatitis C in haemophilia patients.
5. It was not set up to address Lord Owen's comments, dating from the late 80s, that the papers from his period as a Minister had been "pulped". Unfortunately, none of the key submissions to Ministers about self sufficiency from the 70s/early 80s appear to have survived. A search of relevant surviving files from the time

failed to find any. One explanation for this is that papers marked for public interest immunity during the discovery process on the HIV litigation have since been destroyed in a clear out by SOL. This would have happened at some time in the mid 90s.

6. A report was submitted to officials in the blood policy team earlier this year, however there are a number of outstanding issues which need to be resolved before the report can be finalised and submitted to Ministers.

7. PS(PH) is aware of the background to this review. Earlier this year, officials agreed to conclude the review as soon as practicable. Unfortunately we have been unable to make any progress during the year.

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