

Our ref: TO00000082803

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Mrs **GRO-A**
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4 April 2006

Dear Mrs **GRO-A**

Thank you for your email of 11 March Tony Blair about hepatitis C. As you will appreciate, Mr Blair receives a large amount of correspondence and is unable to answer all of his mail personally. Therefore, your letter has been passed to me for reply.

Ministers takes the issue of those people who have suffered through contaminated blood products very seriously, and have great sympathy for all those who have suffered harm as a result of NHS treatment. They deeply regret that so many people with haemophilia were infected with hepatitis C and HIV. Although I appreciate that nothing can alleviate your loss, you may find the following information helpful.

During the 1970's and 1980's, clinicians were able to obtain plasma products from Bio Products Laboratory (BPL) or purchase imported products from other international pharmaceuticals companies. BPL used only plasma collected from UK blood donors until 1998. With regards to the imported plasma products, we understand that, some Haemophilia Directors would request details of donor facilities from which imported plasma products were sourced. However, we regret that we are unable to confirm that all Haemophilia Directors undertook such action.

It is important to consider this against the knowledge that existed in the 1970's and 1980's. Clinicians knew about the risks of non A and non B hepatitis (NANBH). However, the prevailing opinion at the time was that NANBH caused a mild and often asymptomatic illness. The more serious consequences of hepatitis C, which may take 20-30 years to develop, only became apparent after full characterisation of the virus in 1989 and the development of tests for its recognition.

We are aware that some people would like the Government to set up a public inquiry into this issue. However, Ministers do not consider a public inquiry is justified. Donor screening for hepatitis C was introduced in the UK in 1991 and the development of this test marked a major advance in microbiological technology, which could not have been implemented before this time.

Thank you again for writing.

Yours sincerely,

Hazel Mendonca
Customer Service Directorate
Department of Health